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Little White Lies

TRUTH & MOVIES

THE ART OF CINEMA

CHANCE
MAMAN
PAPA

On the Cover

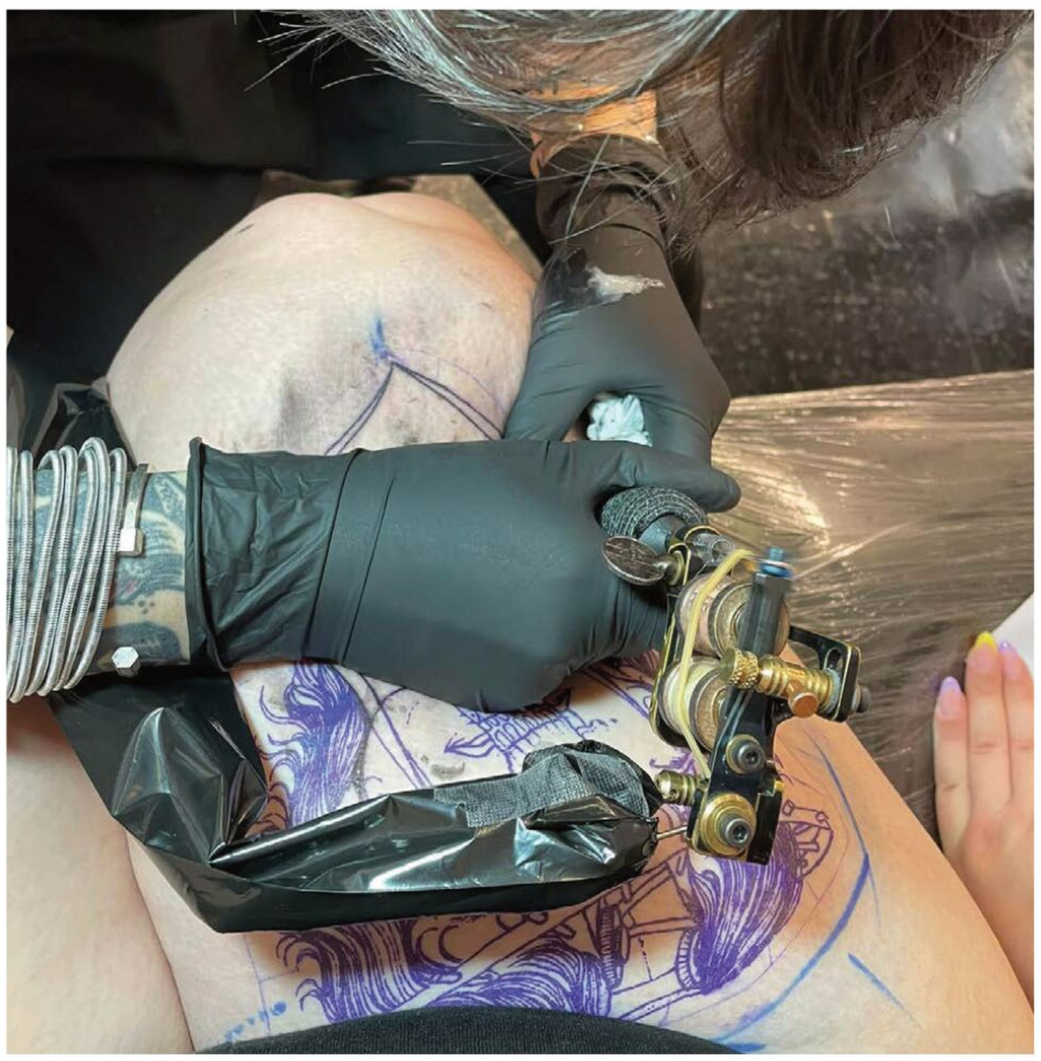
At 10am on Sunday 26 September, 2021, Hannah Strong received the tattoo you see adorning the cover of this magazine on her upper right thigh. The artist was Sophie Mo and the session took place at Parliament Tattoo in Finsbury Park.

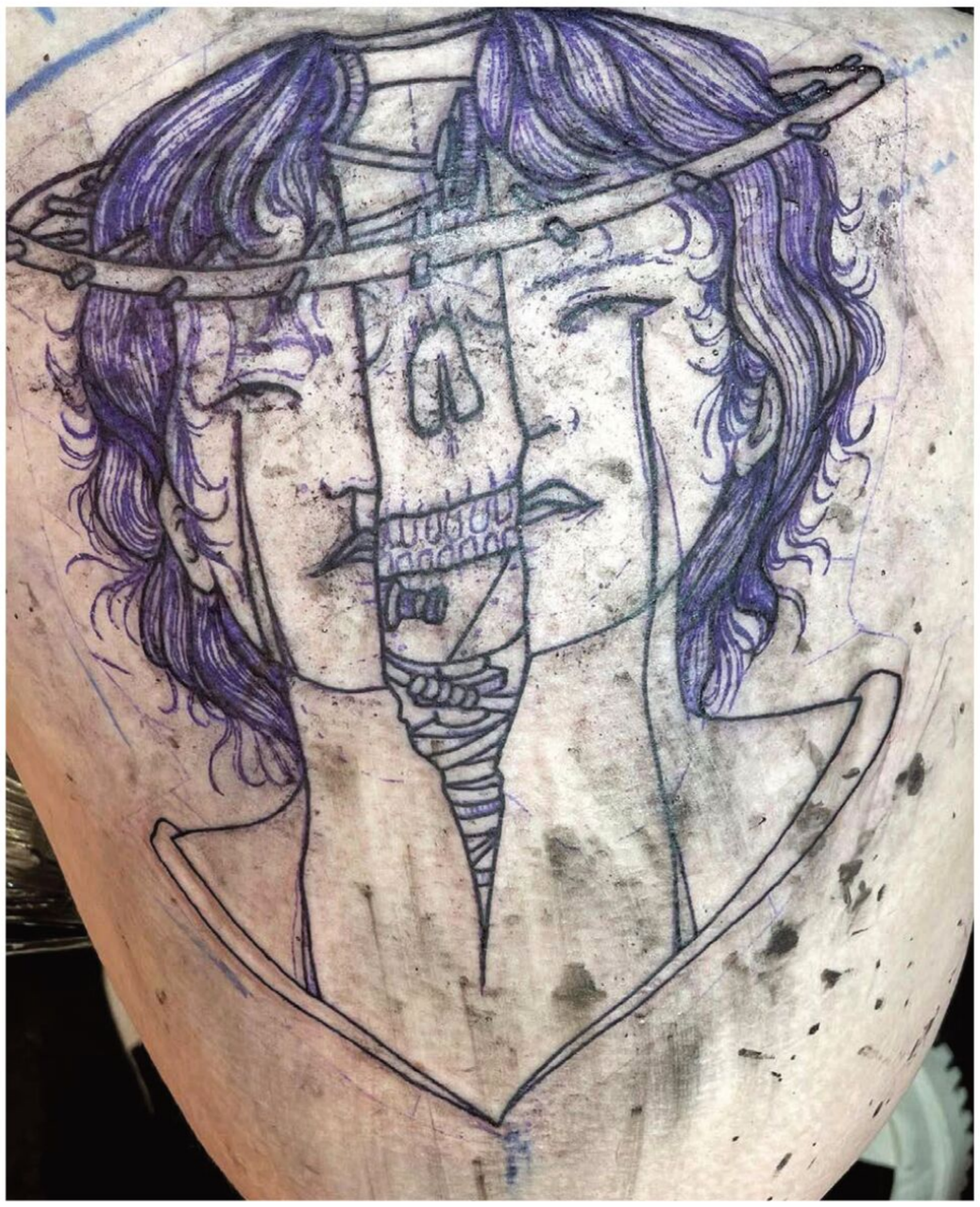
What follows is a short Q&A with Hannah about the process.

LWLies: How many tattoos do you have?
Strong: As of October 2021, 11, though that number is subject to change.

What was your first one and what was the experience like of getting it?
The first one I got was a ghost on my left forearm. Honestly, it's one I really don't like and wish I'd waited a bit longer, found an artist who would do a good job and not rip me off – but I was 24 and your early twenties are for making mistakes. The artist kept me waiting for four hours in the studio which should have been a red flag. He was perfectly nice but I'm just not happy with the execution and have actually started looking into removal. You win some, you lose some!

What, for you, is the function of a tattoo?
I've always hated the way I look, since I was about eight years old and became aware of my appearance. I've had a pretty horrible relationship with my self-image in the resulting 20 years, and I have good days and bad days. Teamed with





my Borderline Personality Disorder, I struggle a lot with self-harm and impulse control. I think my interest in tattoos began when I was a child and read Jacqueline Wilson's 'The Illustrated Mum', which was about a single parent with Bipolar Disorder who was covered in tattoos. Oftentimes I feel out of control, particularly with regards to how I look, but tattoos are something I can control, some way of taking ownership over the way I look, and trying to make some peace with it. Moreover, they make me happy. Happiness is pretty rare in my life so I tend to gravitate towards anything that makes me feel better about myself.

Can you tell us a little bit about this design and why you agreed to have it tattooed on you?

Sophie Mo and I met in 2017 when I started working at *Little White Lies*, and she was just starting to tattoo in her free time. I was one of her first guinea pigs – she tattooed my cat on my right arm, and to this day it's probably the tattoo that gets the most compliments. Since then she's done three more of my tattoos, so there's a level of trust and friendship there. When I saw *Titane* in July, the film really resonated with me in a way I don't think I fully understood until much later. Nothing to do with car fucking and everything to do with being a fatherless, mentally unstable woman in her late twenties who has a contentious relationship with her body. So when we started discussing the idea of a tattoo for the cover, I volunteered because it was something I cared deeply about and that meant something to me. I'm also not much for taking risks, and this felt like a calculated one. Sophie is one of the most talented artists I know, and I love *Titane*, so it felt fitting to me. And maybe in putting a part of myself in the public domain, I might be a little more comfortable with how I look.

What are your future tattoo plans?

I'd like to get a tiny skeleton in a top hat and a line-drawing of a bat. No reason for those other than I think they would look cool. There's a line of poetry by Gabrielle Calvocoressi I really love too that I'm constantly on the precipice of getting tattooed: "I am not going to ruin my love's life today." But that's always subject to change; I think of my tattoos as reminders to keep going, investments in a future version of myself. Something totally and utterly for me. And as a deeply unstable person, I've made my peace with not always knowing where I'm going next.

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Directed by **JULIA DUCOURNAU**
Starring **AGATHE ROUSSELLE, VINCENT LINDON, GARANCE MARILLIER**
Released **31 DECEMBER**

Titane

All hail the new flesh in Julia Ducournau's dreamlike fable of a fractured young dancer grappling with the fire inside her.

There is an easy way to sell any cinephile on *Titane*: this is a darkly funny midnight movie; an amalgamation of capital-G genre pictures; a sexy and strange romp where the structural rug pulls beg to remain unspoiled and picked apart in equal measure. None of that is wrong, exactly. Julia Ducournau's second feature is a total blast, silly and tight and sufficiently gnarly, with sound design that allows a beat after every crunch for the audience to gasp. What makes Ducournau's Palme d'Or winner so special, however, is that it is never quite the movie you expect it to be. It opts, again and again, for the richer, more perverted, more beautiful path.

It does not put you at a disadvantage to know the plot of the movie going in, though it is certainly misleading. The events, as laid out on paper, propose an emotional arc that is different to what's contained within the work proper, eschewing entirely the particularities that Ducournau's camera brings to frame. For now, what you need to know goes as follows: after an accident in her youth, Alexia, played by Agathe Rousselle, works as a dancer in a muscle car garage, the trauma of her childhood leaving her with a scar above her right ear and an erotic attachment to automotive machinery. Following a series of horrific events, she winds up running away and disguising herself as the long-lost son of a grieving fireman, played by Vincent Lindon.

It is impossible to undersell the technical command of form on display here. In an era of mainstream horror when ostentatious symmetrical compositions are all the rage, here is a film where the visual style is split five ways down the side, before collapsing gleefully into a base language of guts. Titane is not a horror film, but it is unapologetically slimy, full of creative, madwoman concoctions of viscera. The violence on display is neither moralised nor strictly provocative. This is just good gore – an olive branch extended to the gross outcasts who dig it. Needless to say, the movie is cool as fuck.

Given the subject matter, 1996's *Crash* is the easiest point of reference, and an early needle drop ('Doing it to Death'

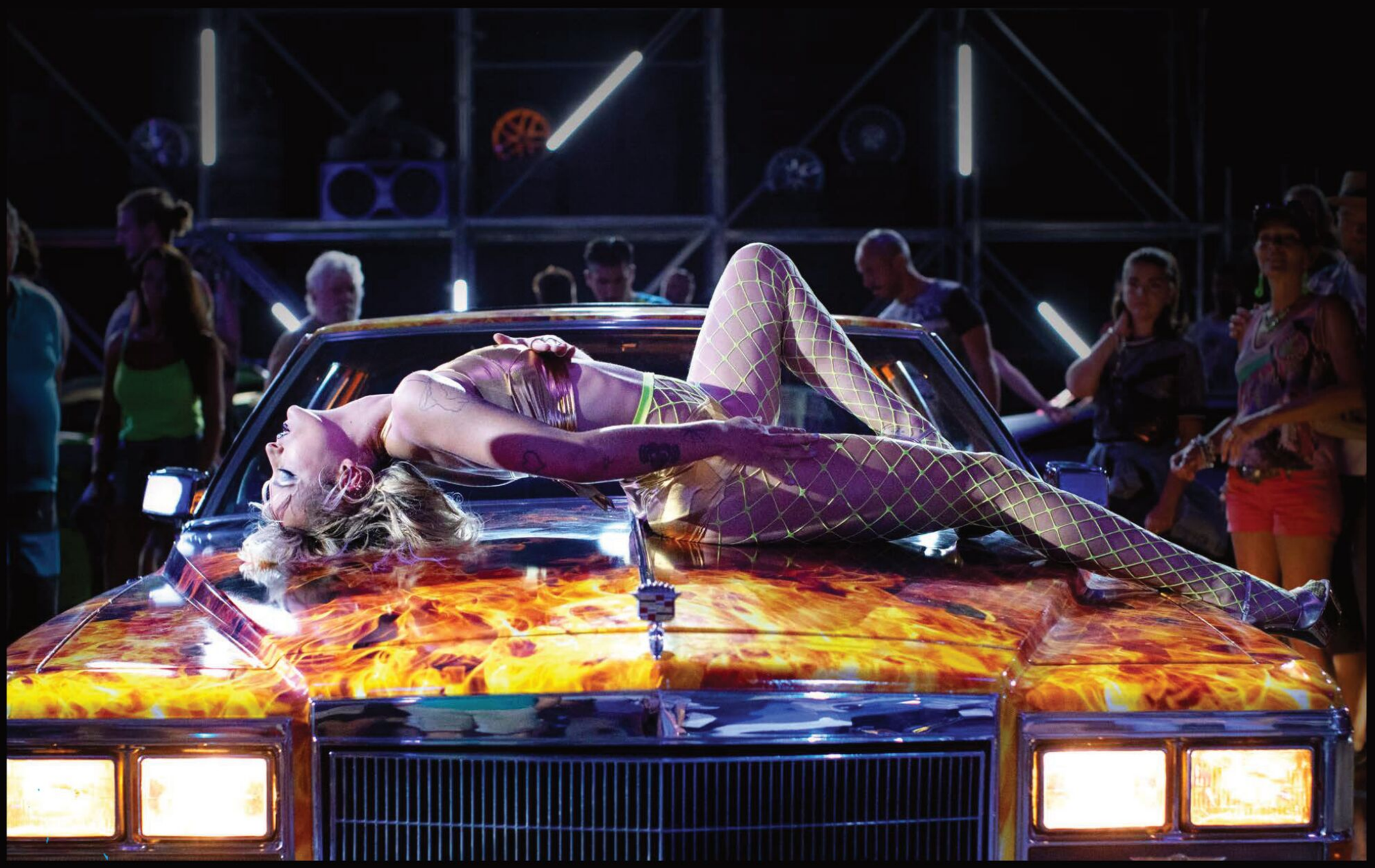
“Every frame of *Titane* is angry, fearful, fuelled by a power born from demons that even the most desecrated of bodies refuses to name.”

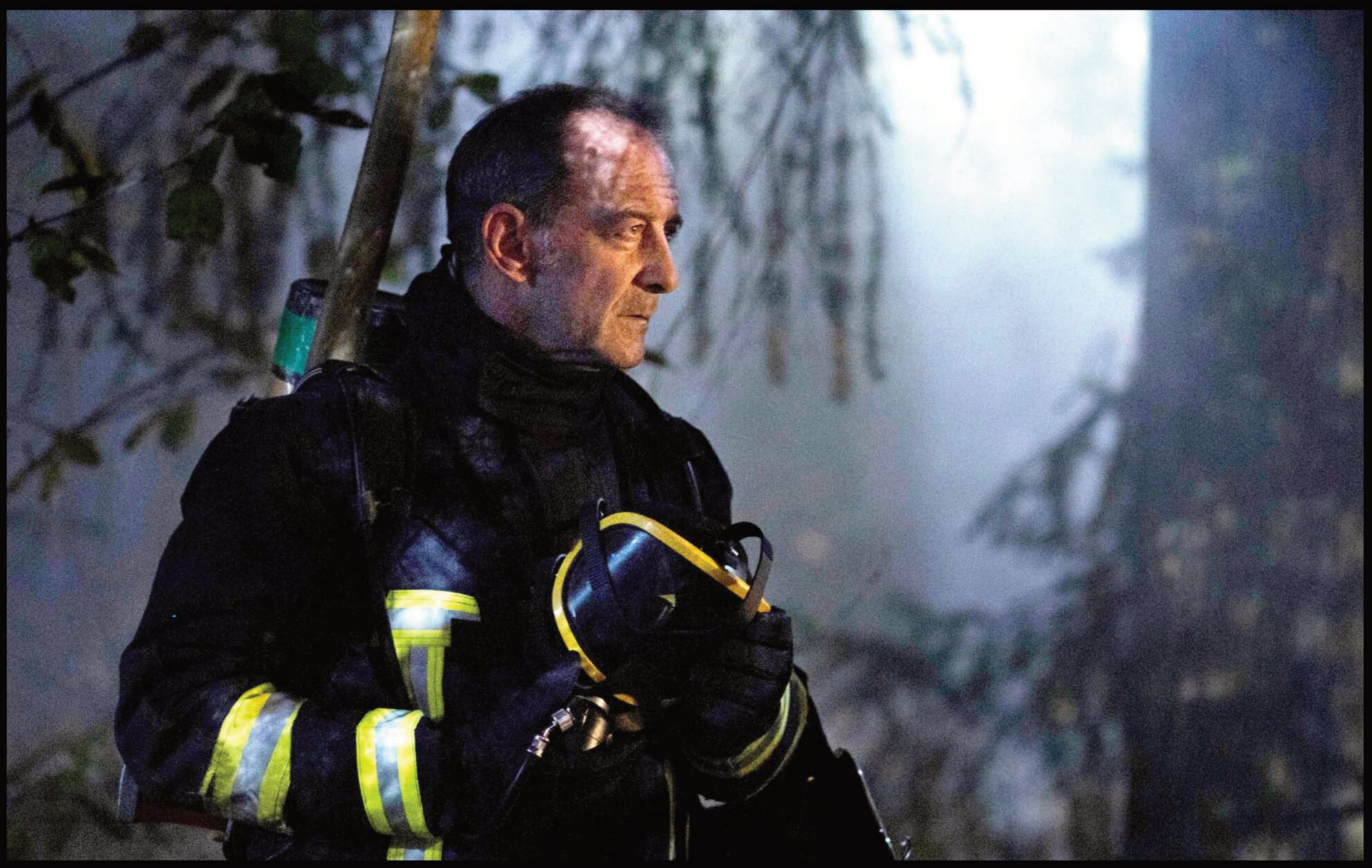
by The Kills) seems to place the film in conversation with the controversial adaptation of JG Ballard’s classic novel. Truthfully, David Cronenberg is nothing but a superficial comparison. The Canadian director’s gore is ecstatic and sensuous; Ducournau’s is pungent and rigid. Penetrative violence comes at odd angles: down the side of a ribcage; at the hinge of a jaw; stomachs splitting perpendicular to stretch marks. Lactation turns into pus turns into oil that clots and empties alongside dense clumps of skin. The characters of *Titane* do not know normative intimacy, and all legibly sexual contact is met with recoil.

The opening hour is a descent into the touch-repulsed mania of a hollow soul. Moments that would play as crowd-pleasing set-pieces in the hands of a lesser director buzz with suffocating isolation. Like the best slashers, any pathologisation of the severe-bodied Alexia falls to the wayside. There is an intuitive logic to the first half of the film, where every gesture is loaded with the potential for danger, every wound becomes a retaliation. Every frame is angry, fearful, fuelled by a power born from demons that even the most desecrated of bodies refuses to name.

Ducournau is no stranger to discontent. Her debut feature, *Raw*, was adequately primal, but unimaginative – demarcated by a self-hating horniness whose hysteria failed to illuminate the horrors and liberties of puberty. Her fury consumed any potential emotional range or thematic complication, a choke collar tugging against potential insights on pleasure and the very French martyrdom of female sexuality. *Titane* does not solve for any previous limitations of the director’s work: the biological functions of cis women still keep a stern watch over any performance of femininity, the spectres of New French Extremity and Camille Paglia offering qualifying statements on the film’s metaphors like the careless insults of a bad ex. When Alexia writhes angrily atop a Cadillac near the beginning of the film, it’s clear Ducournau is going for some hackneyed metaphor about the fetishisation of parts (vehicular, sexual), a dimension of the narrative that would be offensive if it were not so cartoonish.

The whole thing smacks of gender, so to speak. Anything directly analogous, either to the “irreversible damage” of transition so bemoaned by TERFy pundits over the past decade, or the concerns of contemporary genderqueer narratives,





feels incidental. Alexia tapes her chest and stomach down at several points throughout the film, yelping in pain and writhing in agony, her body progressively deteriorating under the strain. There is no suggestion that her pain comes from her repressing her femininity, or her submission to masculinity for survival. Ducournau's script never questions that the main character is a cis woman – think less the befuddled framing of Brandon's body in *Boys Don't Cry*, more Viola's playful scheming in *Twelfth Night*. As we culturally move away from examining transness as medicalised suffering, there has arisen a moment of reflection; it is true that the concept of dysphoria, the dissociation from one's own body and gender, a deep discomfort with the hormones that coarse through a body like active toxins, is a universal experience shared by cis and trans folks alike.

Similarly, while there is explicitly queer sex, Ducournau does not suggest that as a salve against heteronormative structures. Much has been made of the film's tender second half, but it is worth highlighting how thrillingly opaque the dimensions of its central relationship actually plays out. Even calling Lindon and Rousselle's connection that of chosen family fails to encapsulate the totality of their love. It makes the nature of queerness feel inevitable, something discovered by those even without the language for it. The perpetually submissive Lindon gives himself over completely to the film's rhythms, every breath shaking his ligaments, the corners of his mouth aching with grief. In a standout scene, Lindon and Rousselle go on a housecall and wind up performing CPR on two people simultaneously across the room, keeping in time to a mumbled rendition of the 'Macarena'. What could have been a moment of comic relief becomes a startingly diatribe on emotional boundaries and a new kind of closeness. Ducournau veers away from expected fixations, setting up punchlines that are instead replaced by sonnets.

For a film with so much physically grounded imagery, *Titane* finds itself often flirting with the metaphysical, such as a late moment in which Lindon accidentally engages in bedside self-immolation. There is a tension between what our bodies allow and what our desires crave that collapses by the film's finale, just as Ducournau's limited conceptions of patriarchal society collide with a radical, anthropocenic queerness. *Titane* is a genuinely weird, sweet thing, even in a time where those descriptors get thrown around far too much. There has not been a more surprising motion picture in years. **SAM BODROJAN**

ANTICIPATION

Palme d'Or or not, this sounds like a try-hard edgelord provocation. **2**

ENJOYMENT

Heavy-Metal-Heart-type-beat. Exhilaratingly messy. **4**

IN RETROSPECT

A film that defies emotional physics, a tender treatise on intimacies which we have yet to name. **5**

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"Some projects I'll go into with a really strong idea of what I'm doing at the beginning. Other times it'll be like fumbling about in the dark."

- DANIEL PEMBERTON

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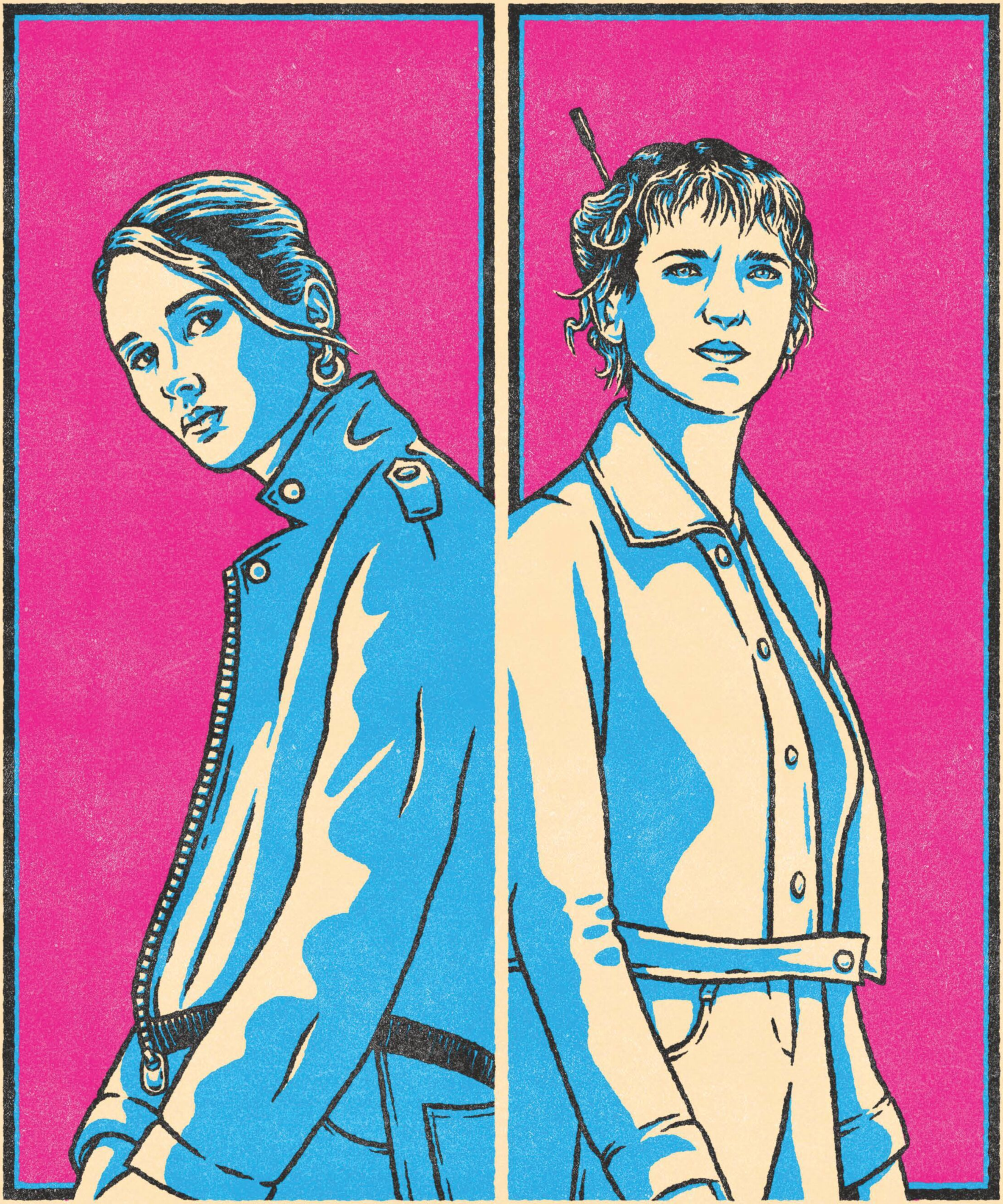
THE MAGAZINE THAT'S REDEFINING COMPOSER CULTURE.

Sacred Hearts

JULIA DUCOURNAU AND
AGATHE ROUSSELLE
ON 2021'S MOST
EXTRAORDINARY FILM,
TITANE.



Words and interview by **ANNA BOGUTSKAYA** *Illustration by* **AARON LOCKWOOD**

PART ONE: A CONVERSATION WITH JULIA DUCOURNAU

Not to be dramatic, but *Titane* is transcendent cinema. Julia Ducournau's follow-up to 2017's cannibal coming-of-age tale *Raw* is a wild ride of mythic proportions that parlays body horror, dark comedy and family drama into a singular cinematic experience. *Titane* (a nod to both the metal used to make surgical implements and a feminised version of the Greek deity) is the mutant child of David Cronenberg and Shinya Tsukamoto, packed with ideas that borrow from Simone de Beauvoir's theory of gender, the Bible and the work of photographer Nan Goldin.

The film won the Palme d'Or at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival, making Ducournau only the second woman to win the top festival prize after Jane Campion in 1993. It is also one of the wildest films to ever pick up the prestigious award.

Titane stars newcomer Agathe Rousselle as Alexia, a dancer with a car fetish born from a traffic accident in her youth which evolves into a serial killing streak. Playing opposite her is French powerhouse veteran Vincent Lindon as Vincent, a grief-stricken firefighter who has lost his son. The way in which their stories intersect is best left for the viewer to discover, but it makes up the emotional anchor of a film that is, beneath it's glossy and oft grotesque visuals, a story about love.

LWLies: After the success of *Raw*, did you feel pressured by people's expectations about what you were going to do next?

Ducournau: Yes, a terrible pressure. Obviously, the outside expectations were very present in my mind. But the worst part was that I had a lot of expectations for my second film. I spent so long making and promoting *Raw*, my main fear was that I was not going to be able to give as much energy or as much love to a second film. This is a very depressing thought when you're trying to do something. I was paralysed for a year, unable to write anything. Somehow it transformed into a form of anger against myself and also against the world – against all these silly expectations. I was sick of comparing a film that I hadn't even written to a finished film. This lost year, as bad as it was, plays a big part in the fact that *Titane* is so radical, because at one point, I was really in this kind of 'fuck off' mood.

Both *Titane*, *Raw* and your short film *Junior* have elements in common, not just thematically but visually. Do you set out to create a conversation between your work? Do you see these films existing in the same universe?

I'm very aware of that and I try to create an affiliation between my films. I have trouble imagining that when I finish a film, it's completely over. So I think that it's interesting to

"I've always believed in the fact that no one should determine the future according to any social construct, of which gender is one."

try to lay out a territory, and try to dig deeper every time. For example, the shot in *Titane* where Alexia is on the bed under the sheet looks a lot like the shot in *Raw* with Garance Marillier under the sheet. It's the same sheet. I asked my set designer to keep it because I knew I was going to use it in the next film. I like the way it looks on screen, its innocence – and also maybe I'm a bit of a fetishist, let's not fool ourselves.

Both *Raw* and *Titane* have hit a nerve in the cultural conversation in different ways, this film specifically around gender fluidity. How much do these conversations influence your writing?

I'm not on social media, so I'm cut off from a part of this conversation. In terms of fluidity, it's pretty much the way I've always seen the world. I've always believed in the fact that no one should determine the future according to any social construct, of which gender is one. For me, the boundaries between both genders just don't make sense. I've always said to Garance, who's 22 now, that I think her generation is way more open-minded than ours. I feel a bit like an old fart, but it's super refreshing to see and it proves my point. My point – which is also Simone de Beauvoir's point because I haven't invented anything at this level – is that gender stereotypes are not only limiting for the individual, but also incredibly limiting in the interactions you have with others. They're socially limiting.

With that in mind, bodies are very central to your work, and people have been calling *Titane* a body horror, but it's interesting how Alexia is so detached from her body and Vincent is obsessed with this ideal of a male body. How did you approach them?

I tried to treat both bodies in the same way through nudity. The only thing that is an exception is the sex car scene, which had to be a sensual and seductive. I really wanted people to believe it, so there's a real sensuality about it. I'm talking about the car, by the way [laughs]. For the rest of the film, both of them are constantly naked and I wanted to show them in the most trivial way. The triviality of the body moves me. It moves me in general with people and with my characters too. It makes me like them more. A body can be so vulnerable, clunky and weird, and it's the thing that unites us all. I'm pretty sure that 99 per cent of people aren't satisfied with their body. It makes us all equal. This is the thing for me that links both characters.

Do you think people react more intensely to seeing female bodies transform in horrific ways on screen?

I do think that with female characters, violence is way more unacceptable than any male violence we see in every movie in the world. Of that I'm 100 per cent sure. I think it's unacceptable to see violence, especially when, like me, you don't want to psychologise it. I didn't want to give it a reason. I never give a clear analysis of why she's a violent character – she just is. And I think this is very unacceptable because we're used to seeing men as the bearers of violence and women are supposed to be the victims. That's actually the reason why I created this character, to give a counterpoint to that idea that a woman is a designated victim. Violence is everywhere. The girl that you're assaulting could actually retaliate and kill you. So I created a character that retaliates. The effect of the transformation really relies on the relationship that I've installed between her body and your body as an audience. Apart from one scene, where she punches her belly, the effect would've been the same with a male character. With that, I wanted to show that with pregnancy, it can be painful and can be unbearable to you, and it doesn't make you a monster.

With all of that in mind, how do you approach filming a violent woman?

The violence in Alexia is also something that I need for you to stick with because she's so morally unrelatable at the start of the film. That was the challenge. If it didn't work, you'd be out of the room after 10 minutes. I didn't make it so violent purely because she's a woman and to prove a point. I did it because that was my entry point to a form of relationship with my character and the audience.

There are two key dance scenes that really stand out, the one at the car show at the start and the one at the fire station towards the end. They are so much about men looking at Alexia, but they are shot in radically different ways. How did you approach shooting those scenes?

At the car show, the camera mimics the male gaze at the start of the shot. By the end of it, she reverses that and took control of her own narrative by looking through the camera and expressing her desire for the car. Even if it's mostly women in this scene, the idea of toxic masculinity is very present. In the scene at the fire station we start with a mosh pit, and I wanted to portray that Alexia is blending in. All the firemen look the same because they all have shaved heads, and she blends into it until you can't find her anymore. In this scene, she reclaims her narrative in a different way. She is absolutely complete now. She is the sum of all the transformations that she has gone through. She's both Alexia and Adrien. Again, the look of the men is very important. The firemen look at her with bewilderment, awe. I didn't think of it while filming but now it reminds me a bit of *Teorema* by Pier Paolo Pasolini. There is an element of ecstasy, and there's also some men who can't look directly at her because she's too strong, too full. This scene is a direct echo of the first one where Alexia is an empty character. She doesn't have emotions, she's an empty shell only powered by her death drive and impulses. Now she's gone through this journey, men are looking at her like she's the Messiah instead of thirsting over her like crazy at the beginning.

I'm glad you mention the Messiah here, because I kept getting the sense that Alexia is an almost Christ-like figure by the end of the film. Was that your intention?

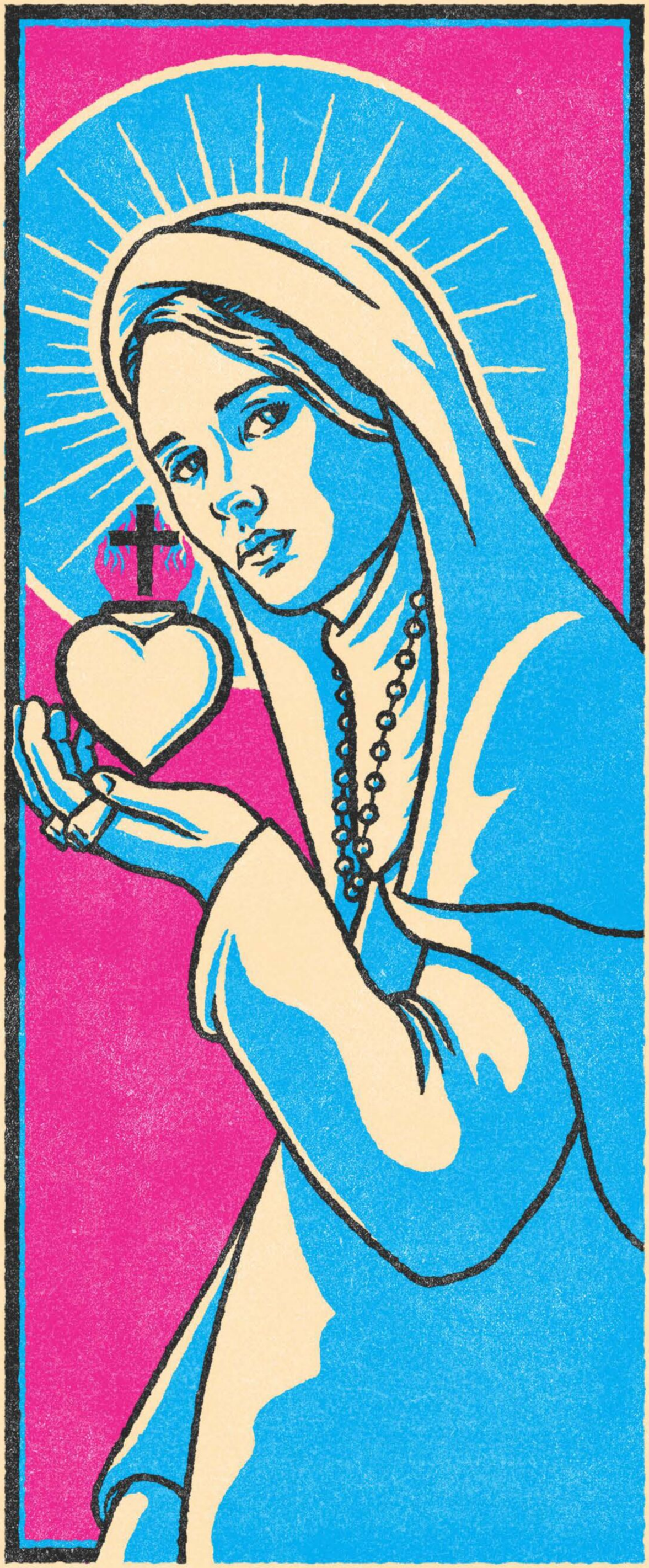
I tried to make her Mary and Jesus at the same time. She's both of them constantly. No one ever mentions this but there are many Biblical innuendos in the film. I really like to play with this kind of imagery. There is a crown. There is the idea of the Immaculate Conception. There's the stigmata. The idea of this character is that she's in between genders, and in between Mary and Jesus. The end would be the birth of the new Jesus, but it's also her who is reborn. So it is the same character, she's not dead to me.

What is it about the Biblical imagery that appeals to you?

I treat Biblical stories the same way I use mythological stories. Because, for me, they are big epics. They're very interesting stories that use symbolism and, at the same time, are very foundational for mankind. It's material you can use to elevate your film to the status of sacred. Sacred is super important to me, even though I don't use it in a religious way, but I want to infuse some element of the sacred in my practice.

What's sacred for Alexia and Vincent?

Love. The movie is all about love. I wouldn't call it a love story because that carries romantic connotations, but it's definitely a film about love. For me, love is not a state, it's



"I'm trying to find a way to make movies that we can't label, that we just enjoy for the sheer experience of it. Cinema is just an experience."

a constant becoming. At the end of the film, Vincent wants to leave but he stays, because it's her. It's Alexia, Adrien, metal or not, this doesn't matter any more. At this point, she's suffering and he's going to express his love by accompanying her.

The film is, in essence, all about Alexia learning to love. Is that the transformation you wanted for her?

This is over from the moment she tells him "I love you". Symbolically it's important that she says it because she's never said it before in her life to anyone. With that, she's reached the epitome of her transformation. For me the ending is more about him.

I read that you had Vincent Lindon in mind for the role from the beginning. What made you think of him for this part?

It's a hard question. It's a stupid answer but I think he was the only one who could do it. Not just because of the part itself but because of what the part implied, the work on the body and the complete surrender it required. I've known him for 10 years now. Many things about him interest me a lot, especially the fact that extremes are in constant coexistence inside of him. He's so alive. You must be crazy not to want to put a camera on him! Since I've known him for a long time, I knew it was time for him to lose control for real. I require my actors to lose control. I don't show them any images. They don't watch the rushes. I don't watch the rushes either. It's completely all in. The actors don't see anything so you really need a strong bond of trust. I require them to be in constant freefall in every take and trust me blindly. In return, I promise them safety, security, total transparency as to how I'm going to shoot them, and I never betray that trust. Ever.

And on the opposite end of the spectrum, you cast Agathe Rousselle, who'd never acted before. How did you work with her to get her ready for this part?

From the start I really wanted to mix these two energies: a huge star who was in full control of his art and a newcomer who hadn't done anything before but had energy to burn. On set, these energies were quite complementary. Sometimes even Vincent would tell me, 'Julia, I have no clue what we're shooting here,' and I would tell him, 'I'm not gonna tell you but you're doing great.' The actors and the crew were very reliant on my vision. They trusted me a lot, and I'm so grateful for that. I did a huge casting call and saw male and female actresses. I wanted an androgynous look for Alexia. Agathe's looks, obviously, are one thing that struck me. She has an incredible face that is very shapeshifting. We worked for a year and this was the big risk for me because I could tell that she couldn't act before. We had to work on other scripts because mine is almost mute. We worked on various monologues that had a huge spectrum of emotion in order to see what we could get out of her and her limitations. We worked on the 'Mad as Hell' scene from Sidney Lumet's *Network*, which goes from sarcasm to full anger and shared despair. Also Donna's monologues from *Twin Peaks*, which are super emotional. And then, because the characters are a bit close, we also did some of Villanelle's monologues from *Killing Eve*. There was also this huge physical preparation. Agathe didn't know how to fight, and she was supposed to look like she could seriously stab you.

We've been talking about *Titane* as a love story, and all the mythological elements, but let's talk about the horror. What do you think about horror films being made now and do you see your work fitting into that genre?

No, I don't see my work fitting into any genre, to be honest. I use the tools from so many different filmic grammars. I try to digest them and then have fun, be playful with them and disrupt expectations. There are obviously some body horror elements, but also some comedy, thriller and drama elements. I'm trying to find a way to make movies that we can't label, that we just enjoy for the sheer experience of it. Cinema is just an experience.

A thing I find slightly frustrating on your behalf is how your work is labelled extreme, transgressive or provocative. What do you think of those reactions?

I do think there are some people who do not share my vision of gender, some people who are stuck in social constructs might find it transgressive, sure. I don't intend to be transgressive, it's not like it's a political plan. Provocation is something that bothers me a bit more. Because provocation for me is a bit selfish. It's like you're trying to pleasure yourself, not thinking about the audience. Whereas, I personally like to provoke reactions in people, or provoke debates with people. This is different – it's a two-way street. It's constructive. So I like the verb 'provoke', but I hate the noun 'provocation'.

What kind of conversation do you want to provoke with *Titane*?

In the same way I don't want to explain my film, I'm not going to tell people what they should talk about when they talk about it. I just hope that people are not going to have the same opinion on it and in the end they're going to come out of their conversation with a richer, more complex view of the world

Words and interview by **HANNAH STRONG** *Illustration by* **AARON LOCKWOOD**

PART TWO: A CONVERSATION WITH AGATHE ROUSSELLE

Landing a lead role in a Palme d'Or-winning drama from one of France's most exciting new filmmakers is something most actresses would kill for – particularly a part as complex and challenging as the one *Titane* provides. Agathe Rousselle gamely takes on the persona of Alexia, a dancer with violent tendencies and strange predilections who goes on the run from her past and forms an unlikely bond with a grieving firefighter. Striking, subtle and hypnotic, she commands the screen in a way that feels effortless – an achievement made all the more impressive given it's her debut film role.

LWLies: I read that you had an embroidery business before you got the part in *Titane*?

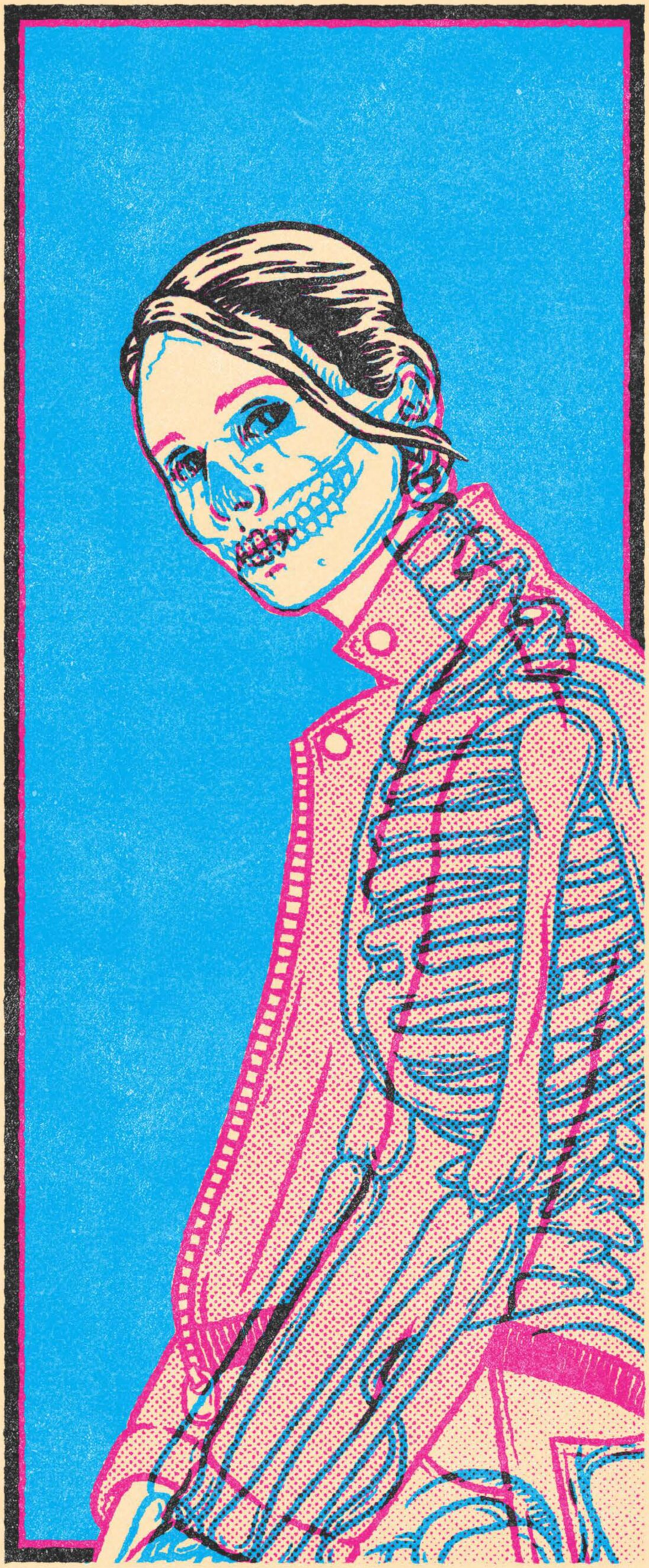
Rousselle: I have wanted to be an actress since I was 15 or something, so I did a lot of drama classes until I was like 21 or 22. But then I just started doing a bunch of different things that don't really make sense with each other. It would be absurd to name all the things I did because they have no connection to acting, but I know that whenever I had the opportunity to be in a short or a music video, or even to model, I would do it straight away, because to me it was the closest thing to acting, which is what I really wanted to do. I'm happy I had a bunch of different lives before I got to do the thing I've always dreamed of.

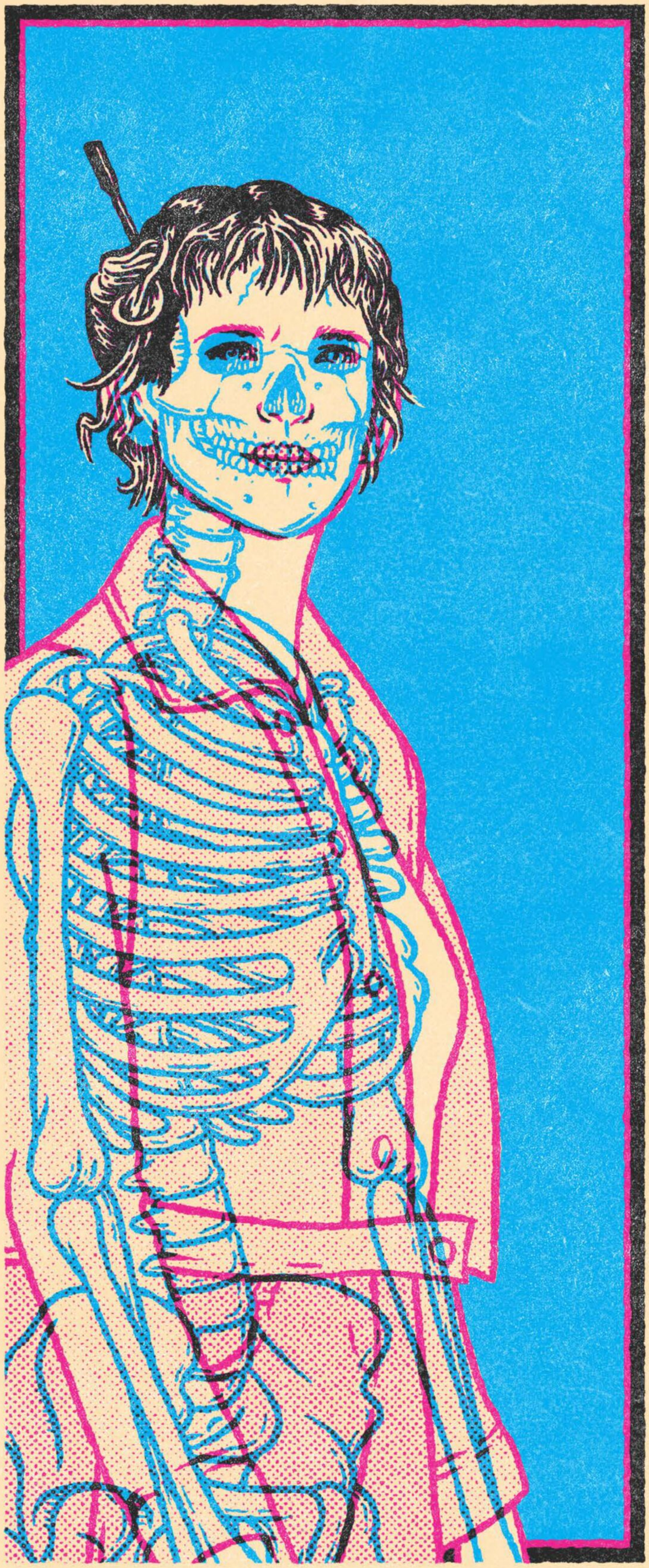
It can often help to have a little life experience with acting, and to have a lot of different skills you can fall back on.

Yeah, and it's also been a very affirming thing for me, because I know that I can do so many things. I want my acting career to happen – this is all I want – but knowing I'm able to do other stuff takes some of the pressure off me. I know that if it doesn't work out, I'll find something else. I don't want to find something else ever again, but you don't always have that much control over things. Being an actress is something that so many people dream about, and I've been dreaming about it myself for so long, but at the end of the day, it's a job. It's work.

***Titane*'s casting director discovered you through Instagram. How did they connect with you and how did the audition process work?**

I received a direct message from the casting director's assistant, explaining they were casting for a movie and asking if I would be interested in auditioning, and I said yes, because at that time I would have said yes to anything. I had the first round with the casting director and then the second round with Julia, and then two other rounds before I ended up getting the part.





"While perparing for *Titane*
I found out serial killers are
mostly men, there's only a few
female ones. It's unusual to see
dangerous women."

That sounds quite intense. And you're not a fan of horror films?

No! I hadn't seen *Raw* before I got this role. But I don't think that *Titane* is a horror movie at all. I've watched it twice, and I was able to watch it all the way through, except for the part where I break my nose because that's horrible. But apart from that I feel like all of the violent scenes are pretty watchable, because they're kind of funny.

So what was it about the part of Alexia and the *Titane* script that really appealed to you?

Reading the script, I was so amazed by the pace of it. Sometimes scripts, when you read them, can be quite dry, but *Titane* was so intense. I just couldn't stop reading. It was like a good thriller. I was very excited and I thought the character was just so interesting because it had nothing in common with me. I really enjoyed working on something that had nothing to do with me.

The role is extremely challenging because there's so little dialogue for you. It's all in your expressions and physicality. How did you and Julia prepare?

We rehearsed a lot, and I had a coach to help me gain muscle. Then I had a stunt coach, and this dance coach who was amazing – she's a pole dancer and she taught me everything that I do in the movie. I was very serious about everything, I'm a very disciplined person so it was very exciting for me, and I feel like the preparation part of the process was as exciting as shooting the movie. Even watching so many documentaries and archive footage of psychopaths – with Alexia being a psychopath and me being nothing like a psychopath [laughs] I had to get acquainted with what that means, and how you can show it without it being too clownish.

What did you learn from working with Vincent Lindon, a titan of French cinema?

Working with Vincent was probably the best gift ever. I was kind of expecting him to treat me as a beginner, and it would be right that he do so, but he treated me as an equal, which was so great because it really pushed me further. When someone does that, treats you the same, it makes you feel like you need to be as good as them, which is impossible with Vincent, but it made me want to do my best all the time. He said to me once, 'You know, I love working with you because you're very present. If you're a great actor, very technical, with lots of experience but you're not present, it won't work.' I'm going to try and remember this for my next endeavours.

That definitely comes across in the film, because you spend so much time on screen together and have a wonderful rapport. It seems especially crucial for *Titane* because it's a love story in a lot of ways.

Oh yeah, it's absolutely a love story! It's not about having sex with cars, we don't really care about that. It's about how someone who has never been loved before meets someone who thinks he will never be able to love again, and together they find out that love is still possible. It's beautiful, like they're finding their humanity all over again. It's very tragic, but in a Greek tragedy way. That's what I thought of the first time I read the script – it's like mythology, with this value at the centre.

***Titane* also feels like a truly sympathetic and open exploration of gender, examining what it means to be a woman and what it means to be a man.**

Yes, it's one of the reasons the part made sense to me. Since I was a kid people have mistaken me for a boy – and I wasn't doing it on purpose, I wasn't a tomboy. Growing up it was the same, and I kind of made my peace with it, since I worked a lot as a model on shoots where they wanted someone really androgynous, but I'm not that androgynous, you know, I have boobs and a big ass. I never ask myself if I want to dress more like a guy or a girl, but naturally some days I'll put on clothes and look a little more masculine or a little more feminine. If people say to me, 'Hi sir,' I'm like, 'Yeah, hi, cool.' It's whatever. I'm not responsible for other people's perceptions of me. But I think this question of gender shouldn't even be relevant anymore. Who cares?

It's like Vincent says in the film to Alexia – I don't care who you are, you're my son.

Exactly! Fuck those kinds of boundaries that are of no use, and always attract hatred and aggression. Just let people be who they want to be. And again, the way you look does not make you responsible for someone's perception of you, or how they act towards you. When you think like that, you realise you can live however you want, and it's such a relief. As women, we have to be conscious of what time of the day it is, which neighbourhood we're in, whether or not we can wear a miniskirt. You have to think about your gender just because you're not safe – and it's even worse for marginalised communities, such as gay people, or Black people. You're not free to be who you want to be because these are all the things you have to think about when you're not a white straight male.

Early in the film Alexia is confronted by a very persistent male fan in a car park, and we're used to seeing scenes like that go a very particular way. Even though Alexia is definitely unhinged, that moment did feel quite satisfying.

I wish that men would think for one moment before they treat women like this. A man approaching a woman usually thinks 'I'm stronger, she won't do anything.' It would be really nice to live in a world where men have to think twice. 'Should I try my luck, or is she going to kill me?' Girls should all learn martial arts at school, if only so they can defend themselves.

It's sad we even have to think like that, because really the onus should be on men to not see women as targets.

I know! Why can't men just not do that, is that so crazy? [laughs] While preparing for *Titane* I found out serial killers are mostly men, there's only a few female ones.

That's one of the things I find interesting about Alexia – she's presented as quite an unrepentant killer. We're not really used to seeing figures like that in popular culture...

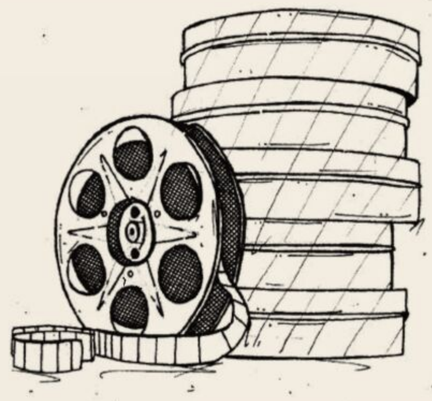
Yeah, it's unusual to see dangerous women. There's a couple of serial killers, like Aileen Wuornos, and she was dangerous but she was also crazy. Pop culture could show more potentially dangerous women that are not crazy – that are just incredibly skillful, and that could kill you in an instant but are sane. Even Alexia is dangerous but she's a psychopath. I wish we could show powerful, strong, potentially dangerous women, because you get men like that, and they're never crazy.

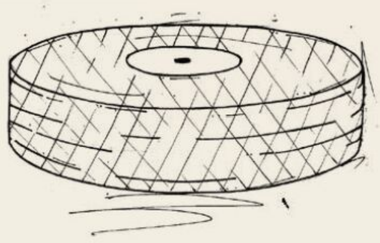
Actors often say when they play a very intense role it can be hard to step away afterwards. Did you find that at all with Alexia?

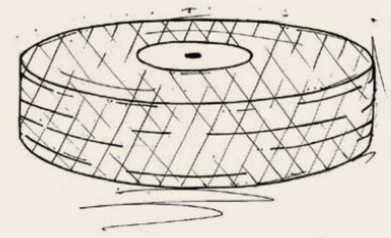
It took me like a good month and a half to sleep well at night again, because we'd been shooting at night a lot and my sleep was fucked. But also there was so much adrenaline every day on set, your body is just tense all the time. So it took me a while to just rest. Apart from that, I was not haunted by the part. I was just very tired, when we finished shooting I was so happy but just so exhausted. And I'm proud of the whole team because the team effort on the film was crazy. It was really intense every day – the makeup artists, technicians, everyone was so supportive. I was spending sometimes eight hours in makeup per day so I spent a lot of time with the girls, so we were having so much fun together. It was a great source of decompression for me

COMPOSER X Little White Lies PRESENT...

WHAT IS THE GREATEST FILM SCORE OF ALL TIME?







Words by **SEAN WILSON**

What is the greatest film score of all time? That's a debate that has the potential to range all day, but whatever one's answer, the relationship between music and the moving image is incontrovertible.

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, filmmakers were swift to capitalise on the powerfully symbiotic relationship between visual poetry and subjective, illusory notes on a cue sheet. In the days of vaudeville and silent cinema, it was common practice for live pianists to perform live to picture before increasingly sophisticated working practices began to take hold.

Organs were installed that could mimic objective sound elements like bird songs, and a boom in cinema construction saw movie theatres equipped with specially designed orchestra pits capable of accommodating the finest classical musicians of the period. An increased emphasis on narrative-driven, feature-length drama resulted in D.W. Griffith's controversial yet groundbreaking *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), whose score by Joseph Carl Breil deployed the use of the Wagnerian 'leitmotif' whereby specific musical motifs are assigned to particular characters and situations.

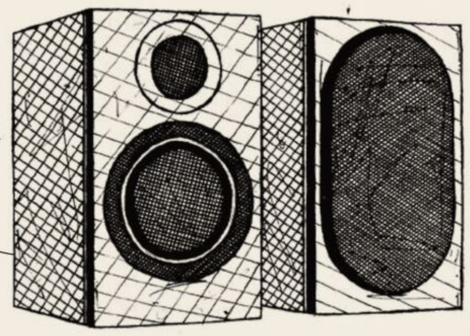
Many of the early 20th century's most prominent comedians, including the likes of Charlie Chaplin, favoured a sense of intricate melody and harmony within their films. With the transition from silent cinema to sound pictures, or 'talkies', the film score was somewhat destabilised and no longer the prominent element in the sound mixture. Full synchronisation between picture, music, and sound elements would not be completely achieved until Al Jolson's musical *The Jazz Singer* (1927), which showcased the newly developed Vitaphone system. Don Juan's pioneering approach, mixing objectivity of sound effects and dialogue with the subjective emotion of music, paved the way for every movie in its wake.

Howard Shore is one of the most celebrated composers of the modern age. Acclaimed for his work on a host of diverse genres, Shore broke new ground in fantasy scoring with his gargantuan, extraordinary *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003) for director Peter Jackson, a landmark achievement that won the composer three Oscars. Shore says that "the collaboration between sound and score can produce interesting results". He continues: "Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* (2011) benefited from Eugene Gearty setting the train station, clocks and train whistles in the same key as the score. Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) benefited I believe from the close collaboration between music and sound editing and design by Skip Lievsay."

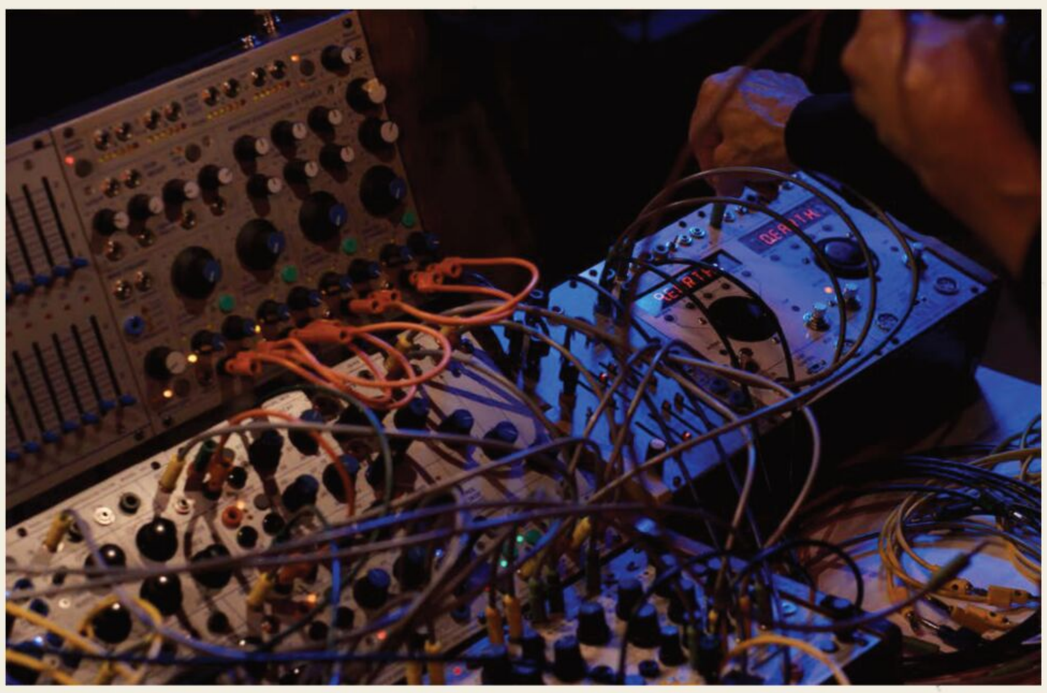
This is an extract from an essay that originally appeared in Composer magazine – composer.spitfireaudio.com

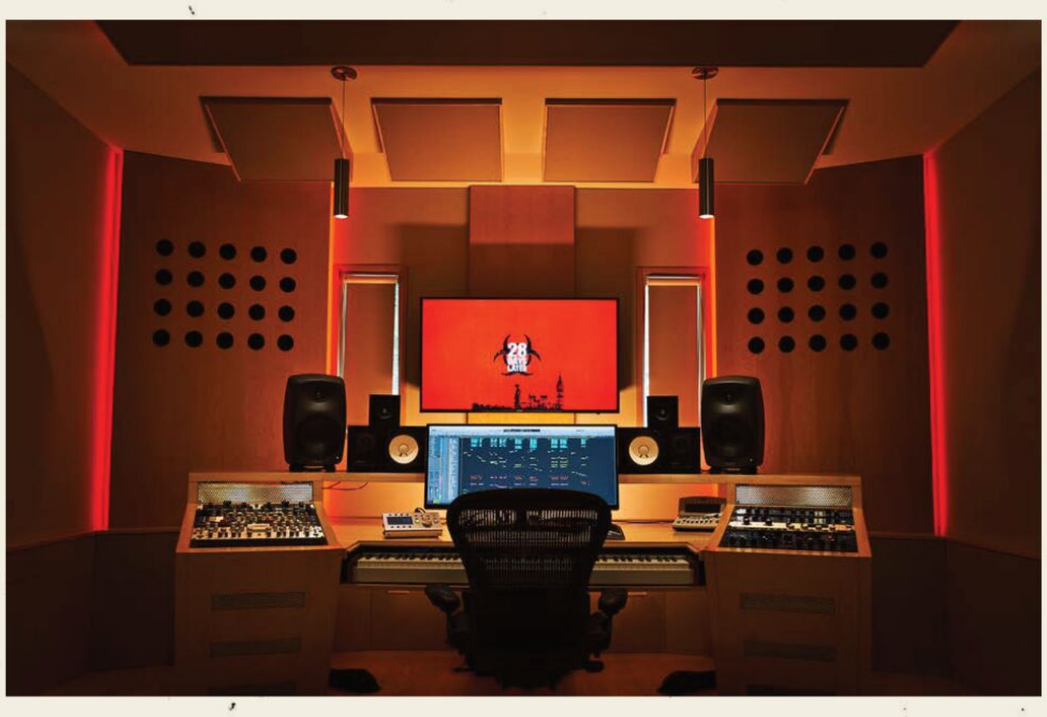
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A COMPOSER?

"I have identified as a composer since being a child, when I scribbled dots on manuscript paper while sitting at the piano... to me a composer is someone who could write music the same way an author wrote books or an artist painted paintings."
Suzanne Ciani



"As a composer, you keep going and going until you surprise yourself."
John Murphy





Clockwise from top left: 1 and 2 from the Composer original film, *Sūzanne Ciani On Modular Synthesis & The Buchla 200e*, 3 and 4 John Murphy's studio, Composer Magazine.

Words and interview by **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN** *Illustration by* **LAURÉNE BOGLIO**

L'HOMME DU CAFÉ

The mercurial French star Vincent Lindon on method, impulse and empathy.

Over the course of two interviews with the 62-year-old French actor Vincent Lindon – one on Zoom and one in person – I have gone from admiring his work to adoring his presence. On screen he embodies masculine gruffness, albeit with tenderness inside, and seems as if he could be a serious man to interview, perhaps inclined to curt answers. In reality he has a great deal to say, and extra lights come on and extra warmth emerges when he sees that you are engaged. The more you are turned on, the more he turns it up, creating a charismatic tension that explains why he is France's answer to Tom Cruise.

In *Titane,* he plays Vincent Legrand, a head fireman addicted to steroids whose young son, Adrien went missing over a decade ago, leaving a hole in his heart. This void is filled when a serial killer on the run, Alexia (Agathe Rousselle), passes herself off as Adrien in order to lay low. Lindon's response to reading the script was primal: "I had an animal reaction. It wasn't a reaction that goes through the brain but directly in my heart. It's like when you fall in love. You know nothing about the person, it's just something charming, something chemical. Somebody comes in a room and you say, 'Wow, what's going on around here'.

He spent two years getting into a specific kind of shape, exercising every other day and watching his food intake, going about his transformation more slowly than he would have as a younger man. Legrand needed to be strong and built-up but with signs of age taking its toll. The notion of pushing back against time was part of the appeal of the role. "I'm very close to the character. We share a lot of fears. Reading the script I saw between the lines that Julia would ask me to prepare my body. Maybe in my mind, unconsciously, I said to myself, 'It's a good way to be in shape and to fight against death and against getting older. I'm going to jump on the opportunity to rebuild my body'."

Lindon is an actor with presence. He doesn't have to *do* anything to make an audience feel for him. When he first appears on screen in *Titane,* over 30 minutes have elapsed, and he is lit red as he walks to the police station where Alexia presents herself as Adrien. His extra bulk gives him the merest hint of swagger, just not enough to overpower a competing sensibility: the fierce love activated by the apparent return of his son. The pair's shared scenes are punctuated by moments of him alone in a small bathroom, injecting his bruised ass with steroids. I hit a nerve when I ask about filming the scene where, after one injection, he falls over and passes out, slumped on the bathroom floor.

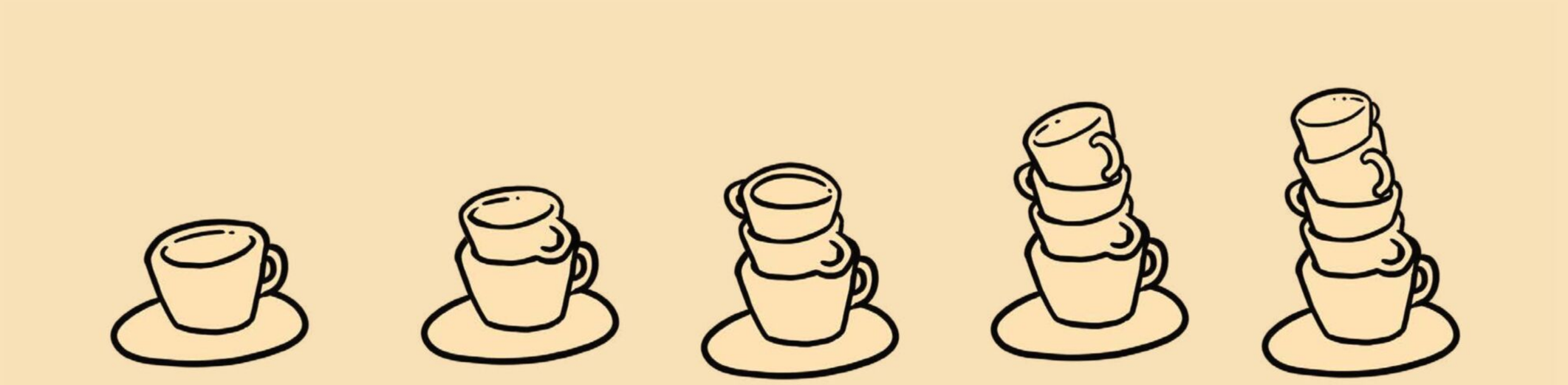
"It was very difficult here," he touches his head, "because the person who acts in this scene, it's Vincent Legrand but it's me. It's my mouth, my nose, my eyes, my voice, it's me. I come in the morning. I dress like Vincent Legrand but it's me, so to see myself falling down and come very, very close to dying... I came back to my house in the night very, very sad. I said to myself, 'One day – not in that way, not in that manner – it's my future and the future of everybody.' I remember that day very well. It was difficult to come on the set. I was like a bull – they had to catch me to bring me to the bathroom."

Scenes like this cut Lindon to the bone because he is not someone who trades in abstractions or hides behind intellectual distance. "My brain is completely on what I'm doing right now," he says, and I feel special to have his attention. "My way of working is completely on instinct. I fight all the time not to ask myself questions, because if I think too much I'm going to find a lot of reasons not to do things. Sometimes, I just run and I do it and... 'We'll see!' When I act it's the same."

Working on a social realist trilogy – *The Measure of a Man* (2015), *At War* (2018) and *Another World* (2021) – with director Stéphane Brizé, Lindon also confronted the spectre of his own death. In Philippe Lioret's refugee drama *Welcome* (2009) he found it difficult to film scenes of a teenager drowned in the Calais jungle. "I try to sometimes do movies with a big social subject and, by the way, you're obliged to suffer because if you want to be a good actor, you have to get very close to the people in the situation you want to explore. You are overwhelmed. But we stay calm. I did not save 1,000 people during the War, it's just I'm an actor, so it's very comfortable."

From the age of six his father instilled in him the vital importance of taking care of other people. "It's the only thing I like. When I go to sleep at night if I haven't done something for somebody, life is not worth living." His father had a small factory making car radios and made a point of employing people fresh out of prison. "He gave them a chance. He gave them a taste of life." They and Vincent were told to reach out before a problem got out of control. Adopting the voice of his father he says, "'Even if you stole something. Even if you took drugs. Tell me everything because if you speak to me I can help you. But if you speak to me after, I can do nothing for you'." These conditioned interests in the worlds and wellbeing of other people have led to a favourite pasttime. "The only thing that I love in life, except my children, is people. I spend about four hours everyday watching people in the morning when I go to get my breakfast at the Café du Coin." This people-watching goes full circle in terms of informing his craft, but more on that later.

"I remember that day very well. It was difficult to come on the set. I was like a bull – they had to catch me to bring me to the bathroom."



Having taken him to the brink of death I steer the conversation to love and tenderness. In Claire Denis' 2002 film *Vendredi Soir* he plays Jean, the sexy stranger that Laure (Valérie Lemercier) picks up during a traffic jam the night before she moves in with her boyfriend. The whole film unfolds in a mist of sensuality. Whether Laure and Jean are sitting beside each other in her car, kissing, making love or having food afterwards, their bodies seem to possess extra nerve-endings. "She wanted to film everything," he mimes a camera moving across his body, "like that, very slowly. I never met anyone in my life who loves men so much. It's crazy. It's nice sometimes, to be so much loved."

Lindon and Denis reunited in 2013 for the harrowing revenge film *Bastards* and once again for the forthcoming *Fire* in which he shares the billing with Juliette Binoche and Grégoire Colin in a love-triangle story. He says it is "a love story but very... 'wow'... with love and ruthlessness, which is really, really nice. It's *Vendredi Soir*, but like after *Vendredi Soir*."

"Samedi?" I suggest, and he laughs generously at my small joke "Yes! Saturday! She's very complicated in the good way," he says, "If I can imitate her..." He adopts a soft, husky, uncannily accurate Claire Denis voice:
"'Vincent, I thought... No, never mind.'
'What? What, Claire?'
'No, it's... maybe but... I don't know, I see that guy with a brown shirt... But maybe I'm stupid and I'm wrong. What do you think?'
'Yes, maybe a blue...'
'Yeah, you're right, it's better in blue.'
Ten days later. 'It's good in blue, but *why* do I still want brown? I don't know it's uh.... oh, no no, forget it.'
And at the end in the movie, you're in a brown shirt.
I like it a lot because she has a vision but she's not sure."

His choice of films and collaborators pertain to his good instincts, something that he places his faith in wherever it leads, and thereafter he works out the details. Worldly gains cannot tempt him if these do not match up with his gut. "I have a good instinct. I can't do something I can't feel or I don't want to do. It's impossible. Even 10 million dollars, even one plane, two helicopters, five asses. If I don't want, I don't want. And if I want, nobody can stop me. If I can't go by the door, I come by the window and if the window is closed, I'm climbing on the roof, but if I have to be somewhere, I'll be there."

Where do these powerful instincts come from? Did he have a type of formal acting training? "It's difficult because I have the choice to tell you the truth or to lie." Tantalised, I burst out, "Tell me the truth! Please..." But he hasn't finished unpacking the framework of his answer and tells me to wait. "If I lie, it seems like my answer will be intelligent and wow-woah. If I tell you the truth you have to write it very well, because if not people will say, 'He's fucking stupid. He's empty. It's nothing' So I'm going to tell you the truth. I don't read so much. I don't go so much to museums. I don't travel so much. I prefer to sit on a table in a café and stay for a long time."

"I just watch people and I pick up things from everybody and I put it in my box – like when you go to the flea market – and I put it in my head. When I need something I do..." he makes an electronic searching sound "do-ba-do-do-doop and oop! I take it."

We end our time together with a dialogue exchange out of the Don Hertzfeldt school of non-sequiturs. As I'm walking out of the room I turn to him and say, "It's my dad's birthday today." He says, "Can I kiss you?" Replaying the tape later, two loud smacks ring out as kisses are planted on my cheeks in the style of a French goodbye. Acting on your instincts returns highs like these, moments of connection that fade to nothing interpersonally, but are preserved in perpetuity when captured by a camera. The quality of being with him – the intensity, the warmth, the commitment to the moment – are all there in Vincent Legrand

LWL COMICS

OCT. NO 1

TRAGIC ROMANCE

15¢

tales of true love!

Interviews by **MARINA ASHIOTI** *Illustrations by* **JENIFER PRINCE**

THE GORE GORE GIRLS

LWLies meets five women working to bring quality blood and guts to a screen near you.

INTRODUCING THE ARTISTS...

1. MONTSE RIBE

An Oscar-winning SFX makeup artist from Barcelona who works in film (*Pan's Labyrinth, Hellboy II: The Golden Army, Crimson Peak*) and television (*Westworld*). She co-runs DDT Efectos Especiales with David Martí.

2. VALENTINA VISINTIN

An Italian SFX makeup artist working in film (*Guardians of the Galaxy*, X-Men: First Class, *Suspiria*) and television (Game of Thrones, Doctor Who). She directs the VIVA FX workshop in Milan alongside cultural association EffectUs, promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange between artists in the industry.

3. VENIESA DILLION

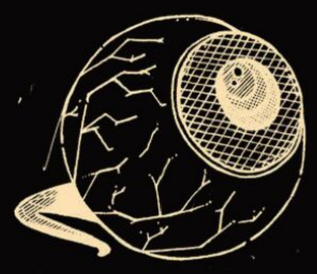
An SFX horror artist and creature concept designer working in Los Angeles. Her gore effects and alien designs are featured in many independent horror productions and short films (*Harvested, Blood Night, Netflix & Chill*).

4. CHRISTALLA PHILIPPOU

An New York-based SFX makeup and hair artist who has worked on Jim Jarmusch's zom-com, *The Dead Don't Die*. Charlie Kaufman's *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* and *Coming 2 America*. For Heidi Klum's last epic Halloween party in 2019, Christalla worked on Tom Kaulitz's bloodied astronaut costume to match Heidi's gory flesh-eating alien.

5. SHAINA PAULSON

A Los Angeles-based makeup and SFX artist who works in film (*Perfect, Kuso*), television (*The Eric Andre Show, Astronomy Club: The Sketch Show*) and music videos, having produced makeup effects for the likes of Katy Perry, Slipknot and Future.



QUESTION 01: WHAT IS THE WORK THAT YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF IN YOUR ROLE AS AN SFX MAKEUP ARTIST?

MONTSE: *Pan's Labyrinth* was something that took a lot of effort, but we learned a lot doing it. It was an amazing journey, and all the hard work paid off with the Oscar and everything. For *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*, I actually went through the entire process because I played the character of Young Hellboy – I did the sculpting, then they applied the makeup on myself. It was hard to find a design for Young Hellboy, but in the end we were really happy, and Guillermo [del Toro] was super happy as well. The last one would be for *The Devil's Backbone*. I loved the makeup we did for the ghost, with the cracked porcelain skin.

VALENTINA: I'd always say that it's the job I'm currently on that's the one I'm most proud of, and I always wish that the next one is gonna be the best. Currently I'm working on the second season of a TV series called *Romulus* on Sky, and it's my third experience as head makeup and prosthetics designer, so I'm learning to deal better with a lot of people. I was already inclined to do hard work because I'm a workaholic. The human side is something I had to work on because there's so many aspects that make a good crew, a good environment. I'm learning to be more flexible and allow people to take their time. Totally unexpected, cause I used to seriously push and demand a lot! Everybody needs to bring out their best features, and that's only possible when you trust them.

VENIESA: I had to design this alien and make it out of foam latex. It was when Covid had shut everything down and I had no options, so I managed to reuse a life cast that I had of an old friend of mine. I did the concept design on [digital sculpting software] ZBrush, had it 3D printed, built the whole thing, sculpted it, and I found this FX shop and rented their oven. I was asked to do this by a producer based in the UK, and I'm in America so I just did it all, sent him photos of it, and he goes, 'Oh, I love it!'

CHRISTALLA: One that comes to mind immediately is a set of butterfly wings I made from scratch for an artist friend of mine. It was the first time I fabricated an effect all on my own from start to finish. I also did their hair and makeup for the final shoot as well. There are a lot of things looking back that I would change technically, but I was super proud at the fact that I pulled off such a complicated job on my own.

SHAINA: There are so many projects where I've been fortunate to work with some very talented directors, producers, actors, musicians, and creatives. I think the projects where I was able to really express my creativity and add my own vision to a creature, character or look are the ones I take the most pride in, like Hilary Roberts' music video 'Ringer' where I was part of the creature process from start to finish.

QUESTION 2: WHO OR WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO ENTER INTO THIS FIELD, AND WHO HAVE BEEN YOUR MENTORS?

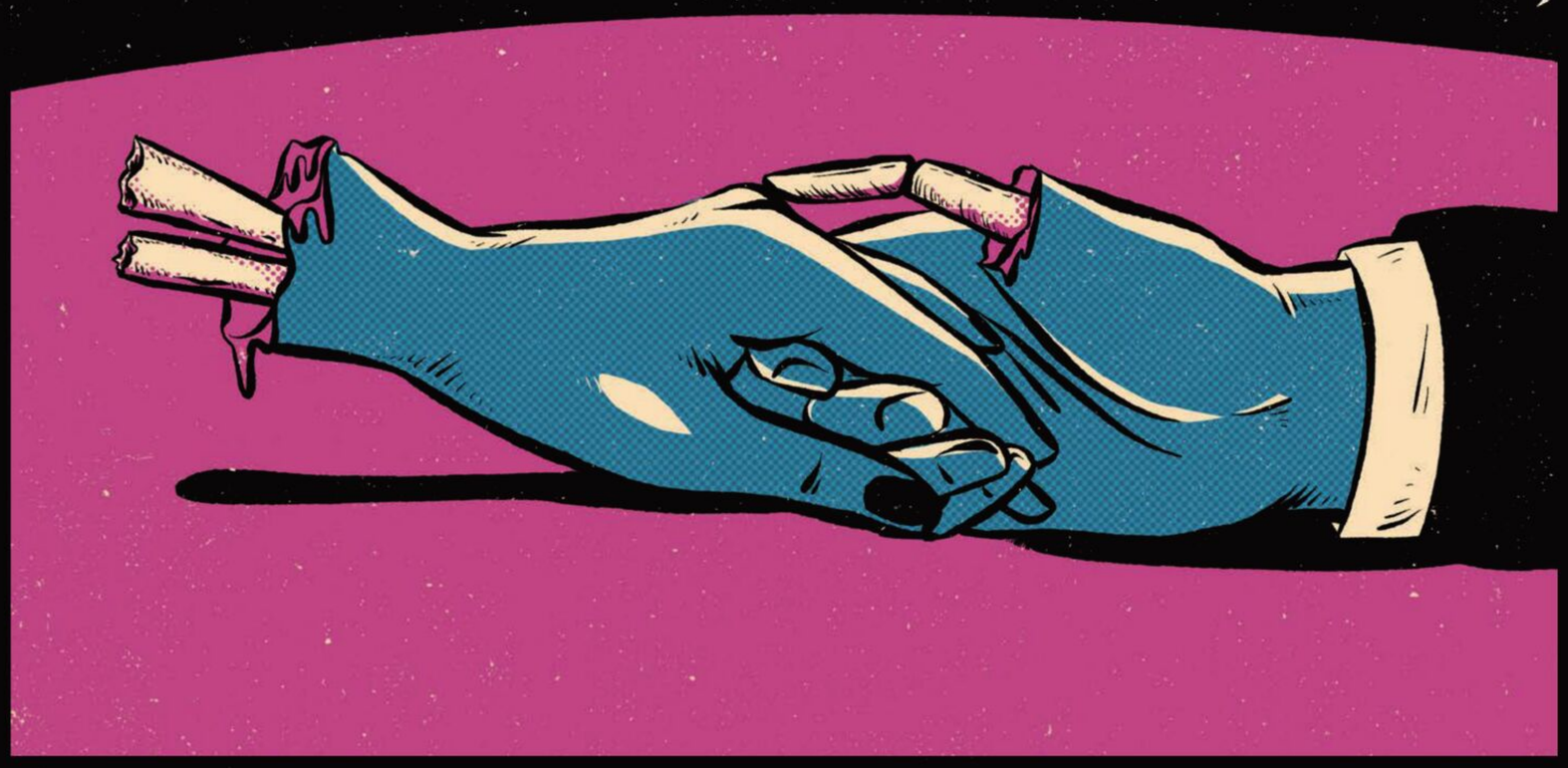
SHAINA: I always loved Halloween as a child. I was very infatuated with movies that take viewers into different worlds, and loved how horror and fantasy films were able to create a this whole other place to be completely immersed in. As a child I didn't realise how that could be a career, until I got to my twenties and realised I could marry my love for film and my love of Halloween into a career in SFX. I taught myself how to do makeup, FX and body painting from textbooks, online videos and just a lot of time spent watching other artists on set. In this industry we're constantly learning and evolving from one another, and I've been grateful to work and learn alongside some extremely talented artists.

VALENTINA: The usual big names, Dick Smith, Rick Baker... Every film with creatures, crazy stories and great character design inspired me. I was watching the films of the '80s and '90s, *The Goonies*, *The NeverEnding Story*, *Labyrinth*, *Legend*. I wanted to find a job that allowed me to do all the fine arts that I was in love with, like painting, sculpting. I saw art as a way of living, so I found this combination with cinema where I could focus on the art aspect. I had a few mentors: Neill Gorton; Mark Coulier; Barrie Gower; Conor O'Sullivan. They showed me different ways of working and dealing with people than what I was used to in Italy where it's pretty hierarchical and you often feel like you've got a mountain to climb if you're the last one to get in. When I moved to the UK, I was thrown into the pit with everybody else no matter what their level was. It was really important for me to experience that because everybody was bringing what they had, there was no hierarchy.

VENIESA: I've been wanting to do this since I was six years old, and it definitely started when I saw *Men in Black* for the first time. That was the first thing that made me really wanna be in FX. In terms of people that I look up to, definitely Norman Cabrera. He was a prodigy, the best sculptor ever at such a young age. Wayne Anderson, Rick Baker, Ve Neill and Eryn Krueger Mekash – I absolutely adore these artists for all the stuff they have done.

CHRISTALLA: I blindly stumbled into this industry in a pursuit to work on movies. I got my start as a beauty makeup artist and pursued hair for a while before getting my FX start at a well known shop on the East Coast. I'd be lying if I said one particular person or thing inspires me. I think it's the pure art and craftsmanship of good makeup that does. I have had a ton of mentors that have greatly shaped my work: Izzi Galindo; Manny Lemus; Mike Fontaine; Brett Schmidt; Greg Pikulski; Trent Taft; Crystal Jurado; Diana Choi; Adam Bailey; Mike Marino.

MONTSE: Jim Henson inspired me a lot – his characters and his storytelling. *Sesame Street*, *Fraggle Rock*, *Labyrinth*, *Dark Crystal*... Seeing not only Henson's creatures but also Yoda and E.T, I thought they looked so real that I wanted to see all the fantasy creatures I imagined as a kid come to life: how they'd talk; how they'd move. Dick Smith was a huge inspiration – he was the Yoda of makeup. He was such a good person – would always share all his knowledge. My partner David Martí, who used to be my teacher, did a course with him and he taught me everything he learned.



QUESTION 03: THE ICONS OF GORE EFFECTS IN CINEMA FROM THE '70S AND '80S ARE MOSTLY MEN — DO YOU THINK THE TIDE IS CHANGING, AND MORE WOMEN ARE DOMINATING IN THE FIELD, AND IF SO, WHAT FURTHER WORK NEEDS TO BE DONE?

MONTSE: It's true, the icons of gore effects are mostly men, but I do think that's changing. When I was starting out I was mostly surrounded by men, but even in our workshop now women are a majority. In schools most students are women now, so I would say that in a few years we will see gore icons who are women. It has to be something that's natural, and that's what we're fighting for.

VALENTINA: It was a man's world. I found that in the UK there were no female bosses but I was surrounded by a lot of female colleagues who were given quite a lot of responsibilities and tasks. There are a lot of makeup designers, but in prosthetics not so many. I hope that the tide is changing. At least people talk about it which is different from past decades where it was a taboo. I met a few women workshop owners in Europe, like Tamar Aviv from Twilight Creations and Montse Ribé from DDT Efectos Especiales. That got me really inspired.

VENIESA: 100,000 per cent. I absolutely believe that more women are getting into it. When I was going into school, it was mostly women, and all the SFX and gore artists that I know personally at the moment are women. I think back then people used to mentor and get each other in the business by taking each other under their wing. It's not like that anymore. Nowadays you need to have all this experience on your own in order to even step foot in the shop and even then they'll just have you sweeping the floor. That sort of mentorship doesn't really happen like that anymore.

CHRISTALLA: In my limited view working in the greater NYC region, there are a lot of women who get down and dirty in the shop and on set. I think a lot of really great artists are brewing in this area, and a lot of them are women, so that makes me really stoked. As far as what needs to be done moving forward, I'm not sure. But if you ever find a good answer to this question please let me know!

SHAINA: For decades the SFX makeup industry has been heavily dominated by straight white men, but I feel like the industry has been rapidly changing and including a lot more women. The majority of the SFX makeup artists and beauty makeup artists I know are women. Granted there's still a lot of work to do to make it a more inclusive environment for women and people of colour in roles of power, especially in FX shops which are still very male dominated. I'm very confident in the future of the industry evolving for the better.

QUESTION 04: THAT YOU KNOW OF, HAS ONE OF YOUR DESIGNS EVER MADE SOMEONE PHYSICALLY SICK?

MONTSE: The wound we made on Naomi Watts' leg for *The Impossible*. I think you could only see it for a second, and not in that much detail, but people in the cinema saw it with the flesh hanging and everything and they had such intense reactions. They were saying that it was disgusting and too much, but you can barely even see it so we were a bit shocked by that. Maybe it's because it looked like gore but in a realistic scenario, rather than in a gory fantasy movie.

VALENTINA: Not sick sick, but you get a lot of funny situations. When I worked on *X-Men: First Class* I didn't see any of the makeup process for the characters that I didn't personally work on. We organised a dinner with everyone and I introduced myself to Mystique's stunt double, and she was like, 'You don't know who I am?! We talk on set every day!' Once my father-in-law started talking to one of my hyper realistic mannequins that was sitting on the sofa – it was amazing! I love when people think that it's real.

VENIESA: Absolutely! I had a body horror that I designed a bunch of different prosthetics for. I added mucus, pus, blood, goo... I also made this mouth foam, so it was drooling and slimy and pus was coming out of its pores and stuff. After a while they were all just like 'Okay, I think that's enough. That's all we want!' Because I was just gonna put *all* the prosthetics on this thing – and I was like, 'Are you sure? I have some slime right here,' and they just didn't wanna look at it!

CHRISTALLA: Oh man, I wish.

SHAINA: [Laughs] I don't know if anyone has ever gotten physically ill, but many people have been grossed out, freaked out, or very scared to the point where they can't look at it. One of my own designs for a short I did recently called *Somnium* actually creeped me out...

Words by **KAMBOLE CAMPBELL** *Illustration by* **LUCAS PEVERILL**

FLESH AND METAL

A brief tour of the world's capital of cinematic metal fetishism: Japan.

Children piloting giant mechanical war machines. Repressed adults turning into writhing mounds of scrap metal. Worlds where humans can electronically plug themselves into each other... A casual observer might pick up on some kind of peculiar interest in technological body horror within Japanese film and television. If that's the case, one might wonder from where this cinematic obsession with the combining of flesh and metal derives.

The answer lies in the roots of Japanese cyberpunk and in a wave of films that sprung up in the '80s and '90s. Anxieties about the influence of technology have been represented in Japanese film and television prior to and beyond the advent of Japanese cyberpunk. Anime films such as Satoshi Kon's 1997 *Perfect Blue* and 2006's *Paprika*, as well as shows like *Serial Experiments Lain* from 1998, are known for their contemplations on the invasive potential of the web, chronicling the ease of access to the lives of others – with or without consent.

Stories about human bodies being grafted onto new technologies are now more invested in digital realms – take 2009's *Summer Wars* or 2021's *Belle*, both directed by Mamoru Hosoda and each with protagonists who live a second, almost entirely separate lives within a virtual space. Before and after Katsuhiro Otomo's 1988 epic *Akira*, the relationship between man and machine also found populist representation in anime shows about mecha such as *Mobile Suit Gundam*, *Patlabor*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Gurren Lagann*, and their own predecessors such as *Getter Robo* and *Gatchaman*.

Although something like *Evangelion* does have moments of body horror and psychosexual disturbances caused by the use of the machines, the pilot (mostly) remains in control and the machines remain shaped in the image of a human master. In (extreme Japanese) cyberpunk, human bodies are intertwined with and changed by metal, reforged in the material of industry. It's a sub-genre that manifested these ideas of people and technology with grit and a galvanising sense of momentum. These films are essentially an answer from experimental, underground indie filmmakers to the unholy, fleshy union between man and machine as presented in of something like David Cronenberg's seminal *Videodrome* (1983), commonly cited as an influence on cyberpunk figureheads such as Shinya Tsukamoto, Sogo Ishii and Shozin Fukui.

The film to first combine these ideas on a scale that found popular success was *Akira*, which Otomo adapted from his own, already influential 1982 manga. Though succeeded by Ishii's *Burst City* (1982) and Shigeru Izumiya's *Death Powder* (1986), when you think of Japanese cyberpunk you think of *Akira*. Otomo's film is

a striking mix of science fiction and body horror whose influence can be seen in films like *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989), *√ 964 Pinocchio* (1991) and *Rubber's Lover* (1996).

Akira starts big, with Shōji Yamashiro and Geinoh Yamashirogumi's propulsive electronic score thundering over a motorbike chase through a neon-lit city. But even with its ravishing visual depiction of 'Neo-Tokyo' (a city rebuilt after its nuclear destruction in 1988), buried within *Akira* is a fear of an infectious plague of technology. It sees nefarious government agents kidnap and experiment on awkward teen Tetsuo, who eventually runs wild with his newfound powers. Where central protagonist Kaneda's bōsōzoku (literally "running-out-of-control [as a vehicle] tribe") biker gang provides an escape from dehumanising capitalist systems, his pal Tetsuo's transformation is the result of being pulled into that same system, a fear of the general disregard for an entire generation that Otomo externalises as a rapidly mutating monster.

During the film's climactic fight, the now-frenzied Tetsuo crafts a makeshift metal arm out of nearby scrap to replace the one he lost in battle, and as he flees into the city's under-constructionan Olympic Stadium, the arm seethes and changes, eventually consuming him. The arm eventually takes the form of a giant, monstrous baby with wires in place of veins. The images of transforming flesh in *Akira* visualise the inequality occurring among Japan's rapid industrial growth during its economic bubble period in the '80s, awaiting its imminent burst.

In contrast to *Akira*, much Western cyberpunk is defined by ties to New Wave science fiction authors such as JG Ballard and Phillip K Dick. And, as pointed out by writer Kazuma Hashimoto in a January 2021 piece for *Polygon.com*, it's also driven by 'Cool Japan' exoticism mixed with orientalist attitudes that embody a fear of East Asian cultural and economic dominance during that bubble period. Japanese cyberpunk, particularly within its live-action works, localises anxieties about ultra-capitalism to the body, as protagonists go through monstrous, inexplicable transformations in reaction to new technologies.

Japanese cyberpunk was known for its extreme content and rough edges; while glossier, noir-infused Western genre films like *Blade Runner* stood at stylistic odds. Mark Player, in a 2011 piece for *Midnight Eye*, says the abrasiveness of local product can be traced back to the 1970s Japanese punk rock scene, with early filmmakers of the Japanese cyberpunk movement like Sogo Ishii, springing up from a musical background (in his case, the punk rock scene of Hakata).

An allegorical manifestation of punk's blunt-force trauma can be seen in Shinya Tsukamoto's 1989 film, *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*. It sees a salaryman (Tomorowo Taguchi) transform into a grotesque hybrid of meat and metal parts following an encounter with a 'metal fetishist' played by Tsukamoto himself. Tetsuo's abrasive tangle of scrap and flesh stems from Tsukamoto just being sick of living in the city, and that sense of isolation is present both in the desolate cityscape, as well as images of metal rapidly taking over the salaryman's body and mind.

The ideas in the film weren't new – it shares a namesake with the antagonist of *Akira,* and its brand of body horror also follows in the footsteps of the very rare low-budget 1986 sci-fi *Death Powder*, directed by Shigeru Izumiya. Yet Tsukamoto's ballistic, often surreal presentation of technophobia stands the film apart from pretenders, as it focuses on the frightening and intense sensations of its transformation rather than narrative logic. Tsukamoto has since left cyberpunk behind, but the sexual repression and buried rage of *Tetsuo* carried forward into other genre work, such as his equally gruesome *Tokyo Fist* (starring Tsukamoto as a fight-obsessed salesman) from 1995.

Like Cronenberg before him, Tsukamoto dared to draw on the eroticism of the salaryman's horrific metamorphosis. It's not long before his penis turns into a giant drill which ends up gorily getting the better of his girlfriend. Yet what makes this eroticism both lurid and memorable is the fact that it takes place not in the towering mega-cities commonly associated with cyberpunk, but among old warehouses and dilapidated factories, or just the four walls of his own squalid apartment. As Player notes, the less fantastical setting and decaying visual style, coupled with Tsukamoto and Kei Fujiwara's propulsive camerawork and staccato editing, imbues the grotesque transformation with a disturbing immediacy, where domestic technology of the era was already spreading influence over our physical and mental being.

The extremity of the body horror in *Tetsuo* is an extension of that immediacy, and the changes to the salaryman's body are as instantaneous as they are wildly emphatic. Where the first *Tetsuo* connects its scrap metal to urban malaise and sexual repression, the 1992 sequel, *Tetsuo II: Body Hammer*, seeks out another primal motivator rage. Another salaryman (Tomoworo, again) becomes so angry his body becomes a gun, in a natural extension of Tsukamoto's toying once more with extreme phallic imagery. Definitive though it may seem in the canon of metal fetish movies, *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* isn't the only work from around this time to explore this taboo nexus of man and machine. Shozin Fukui, an assistant director on *Tetsuo*, applied a

"√ *964 Pinocchio* is a wild and speculative take on Carlo Collodi's classic fairy tale character about an amnesiac android sex slave who is discarded by his owners."

similarly roughshod and experimental style to a story focused on the physical and psychological effects of technological augmentation, with his 1991 feature √ *964 Pinocchio*, another commonly cited highlight of Japanese cyberpunk. A wild and speculative take on Carlo Collodi's classic fairy tale character, it's the story of an amnesiac android sex slave who is discarded by his owners. Pinocchio subsequently undergoes a violent transformation that involves even more bodily fluids than in *Tetsuo*. Pinocchio is a person turned into a commodity and his story becomes emblematic of dehumanisation via corporate greed. The provocations extended by the likes of *Tetsuo*, √ *964 Pinocchio* and their predecessors feel uniquely tied to a moment and a direct response to societal change.

The 1995 anime *Ghost in the Shell* similarly wonders about this potential for technology to change and commodify how we approach everyday pleasure. Its world is one where people have become augmented to fully imbed themselves into their civic roles: typists have modified hands to let them use keyboards quicker; the character Batou has changed his eyes for his detective work. Director Mamoru Oshii, who later made a live-action excursion into cyberpunk with 2001's *Avalon*, takes a talkier and more quietly contemplative approach to the same questions of the body and soul posed by Tsukamoto and Fukui. His 2004 sequel, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, is story that asks whether someone can be a human without the body, and is also about android sex slaves killing their masters. It's in part a reflection on conformity inspired by technology and increasing interconnection between people, as the network that the film's characters literally plug themselves into inspires a more perfectly-realised union between the digital and physical worlds, leading to a numbing of sensation – a 'slow death', as protagonist The Major refers to it.

Following the metal fetish wave, that overseas desire for extreme Japanese cinema would eventually be placated by a new wave of so-called 'J-horror' films in the '90s and early '00s, many of which drew upon the same socio economic anxieties. Indeed, some of the most famous J-horror titles, such as Hideo Nakata's *Ring* and Kyoshi Kurosawa's *Pulse*, told stories that foregrounded the murderous potential of new technology. As a result, Japanese cyberpunk could be said to have succumbed to its own slow death (though Tsukamoto did come back to direct the underwhelming *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* in 2009). It was reduced to an afterthought as humanity's symbiotic relationship with technology became something to celebrate, as devices became smaller and less conspicuous. Now, the dystopian future resembles the sparkly clean, minimalist menace of an Apple Store, rather than the union between a body and a huge analogue interface

Words by **DAVID JENKINS** *Illustration by* **EVANGELINE GALLAGHER**

ONLY HUMAN

An attempt to celebrate Marina de Van's unwatchable 2002 masterpiece, *In My Skin*.

On a near daily basis the easily-rumpled denizens of Twitter dot com will respond to what is known as a prompt. A prompt is exactly what it sounds like – an open question posed with the intention of bringing maximum attention to the poser. What's the first film you saw in the cinema? Or, what's the worst film of 1986? What's your top three vomiting scenes in movies? High-minded stuff like that... Sometimes it's fun to reverse engineer these prompts, to take a film and to fortify the questions around it. Take Marina de Van's 2002 film *In My Skin*, for example. For me it is the film I find most physically tough to watch. It's one of the great films of the new century, unheralded or otherwise. It's a film which boasts one of the most committed, sensual and outlandish lead performances I've ever witnessed. And it's also a superlative horror film that isn't really a horror film – a claim shored up by the writer, director and star of the film herself.

One prompt that often comes up is the request to reveal a film which you personally adore but that no-one else knows about. Of course, everyone knows about everything, so it's a fatuous question, but sometimes I'm tempted to tell the world (or, my relatively modest Twitter following) about *In My Skin*, just to maybe fish for the odd kindred spirit out there in the digital ether. Yet it's not a film for everyone, so I mostly opt to keep it in the chamber until the next time the prompt comes around.

In the film, de Van plays a gregarious, level-headed bourgeois professional named Esther. While mingling at a party, she heads out into the garden alone to nosily scope out the property, and while traipsing through the darkness, nicks her leg on a protruding shard of metal. From her mild reaction, it seems as if she has not sustained a major injury, and so returns inside to find her friend and clink glasses. Later, when the party begins to wind down, she heads to the bathroom and, while idly inspecting her leg, pulls up her trouser to reveal a suppurating gash in need of urgent medical attention. What worries – and intrigues – Esther is less that her body has been seriously damaged, and more that she is unable to perceive the damage.

De Van then pulls at this icky thread and has Esther begin to experiment with pain thresholds, her own corporeal fallibility and the unorthodox, destructive modes of seeking erotic pleasure. Yet *In My Skin* is no psychologically neat study of self-harm and its discontents, rather a completely subjective and dreamlike account of a woman who – for reasons that are hinted at but never stated – suddenly loses the ability to feel anything and wants to know why. There is a scene of self-cannibalism that's about five minutes long which sits close to the middle of the film. It is near unendurable. Esther picks, prods and tears at herself with a knife to the sound of incessant chewing. Some may see it as a cruel projection of de Van's desire to repulse the audience –

to place them in her skin – while others may see a rather poignant realisation of the ultimate mystery of existence, where the flesh we control has a strange way adopting its own form of dominance over our psyche. In a strange way it takes one of the ultimate societal taboos and reframes it as something rather banal and natural, just another form of deep self-exploration.

To reach further under the skin of *In My Skin,* I decided that I would need to speak to the creator herself. She had talked in the past about the deeply personal nature of the film and the fact that it was simply a true telling of things that had happened to her, but I couldn't help but wonder if the intervening years had altered her perspective. It seemed apposite given that her most recent projects are the first two parts of a trilogy of documentary self-portraits, the last named *My Nudity Means Nothing* in which she films herself naked in her apartment while undertaking various domestic tasks and musing on her relationship with her body.

A gushing email to her agent received a direct response from de Van the following day, saying that she would be happy to talk but that she "doesn't remember anything about the making of the film". I put this down to modesty and eagerly organised a time for a conversation. Various interviews published at the time of *In My Skin*'s initial release mention that de Van is not an easy interviewee, sometimes dismissive and combative, other times monosyllabic and unengaged, so this makes me redouble my research efforts in advance of our chat. Yes, I'll admit, I was scared of this formidable woman whose film I was also scared of.

I called her in Paris and she picked up the phone. After greeting me, she then told me to wait two minutes while she took some medication. Then she asked me what I wanted to know, and with unmasked enthusiasm I told her that I was keen to discuss *In My Skin* because I thought it was a lost masterpiece and I wanted more people to share this opinion. Her response: "There was a guy in France who wanted to write a book about *In My Skin* and he interviewed me and then he renounced his idea because I have so few recollections, I couldn't help him to analyse the movie. I hope it will be better for you." Not the best start.

I asked her if the film was something she doesn't remember, or if it was something she was trying to forget. Like a formative or naive piece of art that she had cooled on or was ashamed of. Her answer was more straightforward. "When they are finished I never watch my movies again. So I forget them. Also, it's my way of living: I have amnesia, so I don't recollect what I did yesterday or the day before. It's a general problem I have with life. When I did *In My Skin,* all the self-mutilation in the film was real and part of my life. And now it's many years behind me, so I have forgotten it. But I still remember the story of *In My Skin* because it is my story. What I can't recall – and what the guy wanted to learn from me – was the technical details, the frames, why I chose to film a scene this way or that way. That's what I don't remember. But the tragic story, I remember."

She had previously spoken about a desire in her youth to become a sculptor which, in the light of *In My Skin* and its voyeuristic fascination with the human form, seemed like a solid route of inquiry. But my suggestion was shot down. "I did two auditions," she explains. "One at the centre of art, to be a sculptor, and one at the school of cinema. I wasn't taken by the art school, but I was accepted by the film school." I asked her if she had, since that time, ever considered moving back into sculpture, but she said no because she didn't have the space.

The only other information I gleaned was that it was a difficult film to finance, and that she doesn't think a film like this would get made in France today. She told me that she began self-harming at age three, but doesn't remember any further details, and she confirms a story about how the film was partly inspired by a traffic accident she was involved in as a child where her legs were crushed by a car. The scene in which Esther visits a doctor at the beginning of the film was filmed, she explained, in the same hospital in which she spent time recovering in her youth.

I asked 45 questions across 23 minutes, and as more and more were being batted back with single word answers, I decided to wrap up. I felt no ill will towards her, and frankly found it refreshing to engage with an artist who refused to self-mythologise or feel a natural compulsion to shill her wares. You always hope that an interview with an artist will yeild poetic insights and an enthusiasm to share details of the creative process, but you also have to respect when artists – for whatever reason – would just rather not rake up old graves.

In My Skin is a film which transcends commonplace notions of intimacy, and says something profound about the alien, ungovernable nature of the flesh tombs in which our minds are encased at birth. De Van's devotion to forging her own idiosyncratic path is admirable, but also means that *In My Skin* will unlikely be receiving a lavish restoration and re-release any time soon, however much it deserves it. (Question: which one film would you add to the Criterion Collection?). Reflecting on the encounter, I'm glad that the film's mysteries remain intact, its creator a living expression of the film's own candid reminder that even though we are all only human, that's still a very tough gig

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A column about clothes and movies

Words by **CHRISTINA NEWLAND** *Illustration by* **LAURÉNE BOGLIO**

#19 Threads

The Hair Pin

In Julia Ducournau's audacious new film *Titane,* her protagonist Alexia (Agathe Rousselle) stalks between her stints as an exotic dancer with her dyed–blond hair twisted up in a loose bun. That bun is held together by a long metal hair pin – one which, as *Titane* advances, becomes a tool of unforgettable malicious intent. It marks out the film as one of the few where an accessory as simple as the hair pin is actually pivotal to the plot. Crucially, its association to femininity – in spite of its glinting sharpness – makes it an all–the–more shocking weapon: covert and understated.

Both in life and on-screen, hair pins, clips, and barrettes – along with dozens of other iterations – are used to hold hairstyles together based on preference and hair texture. They're accessories that fade into the background, and into women's coiffures, more often than not. A hair pin need not be big or noticeable, but just as easily might be as invisible as a bobby pin. They're typically functional (like the claw–clips I use, misplace, and repurchase in constant rotation, or the hair tie that Harley Quinn lends to a gal–pal when they're both trying to beat up enemies in *Birds of Prey* – a real sign of girly solidarity.) Or else, they're cutely decorative and that's all: like the neat red barrette Gwyneth Paltrow wears in 2001's *The Royal Tenenbaums,* or the throwback early noughties look of hair chopsticks on a white woman a la *13 Going on 30* (2004). So the question is this: could something so perfunctory possibly mean anything bigger on our cinema screens?

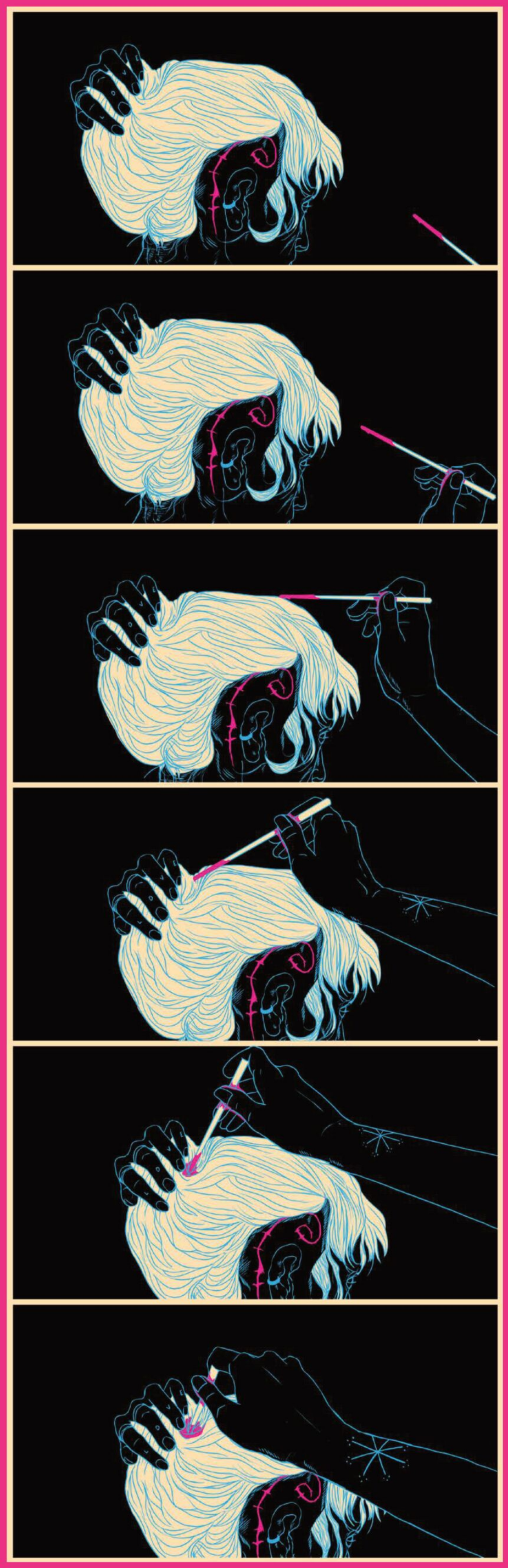
The answer is: probably, yes. In countless societies across time and place, hair has been a source of religious and cultural fascination. Women's hair in particular is a powerful indicator of status, morality and identity. Art imitates life, and what movie actors wear in their hair – as a result – matters. In Park Chan–Wook's hothouse gothic lesbian romance *The Handmaiden* (2016), a butterfly hair pin worn by Japanese lady Hideko (Kim Min–Hee) is nearly fetishised by the camera, its symmetry only matched by the symmetry in lovemaking between the lady and her Korean maid Tamako (Kim Tae–Ri).

In Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill,* Lucy Liu's assassin O'ren Ishii (aka Cottonmouth) wears hair pins with a more dangerous application. She appears in barely–there makeup, traditional Japanese dress and some neat hair pins emerging from the side of her clean hairstyle, looking demure in a meeting with a gang of Yakuza bosses. That is, until one insults her, and she cleanly slices his head off right where he sits. She does it with a sword, but make no mistake: those pins in her hair suddenly seem less decorative. In fact, in ancient Japan – dating back to about 1000 BCE – a special pin called the 'Kanzashi' was worn by women that doubled as a slender blade for the purposes of subtle self–defense. If hair pins feature heavily in the mating rituals between men and women – as self-defense from men, in some cases – they also promise a certain womanly appeal (the maiden letting down her hair, as such).

That can be found in one pre–WWII Japanese romance film, directed by Hiroshi Shimizu, called *Ornamental Hairpin* (1941). A young man stands on a woman's lost pin and cuts his foot open, leading her to seek him out and apologise. Naturally, the pair fall into a rather doomed affair. The key thing, of course, is that even when the hair pin is a means of attraction rather than a shield, it is seen in much the same way men tend to see femininity itself: alluring and nonetheless, dangerous.

This is certainly the case in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), the hypnotic and haunting all–timer where Jimmy Stewart's Scottie works to make up a young woman in Madeleine, his dead valentine's, image. In the memorable transformation scene, Kim Novak, in dual roles, dyes her brunette locks to ice–blonde. Stewart comes in and asks her why her hair isn't pinned back – like Madeleine's. She says it didn't suit her, but he insists. Finally, Novak gives in and exits to the bathroom, where – presumably, since we never see it – she puts up her hair with a hair pin we never catch a glimpse of.

She emerges with a perfect spiral chignon – the final tiny detail that transforms her, and transfixes Scottie in a mixture of morbid and romantic infatuation. In the final analysis, it's the very absence of the hair pin that reveals how much power the item holds. It wields feminine superpower, blade–like danger, and a gateway to the sensuality of loose hair. If, to borrow from Mean Girls, her hair is so big because it's full of secrets: it's the hair pin that holds those secrets safely in its grip



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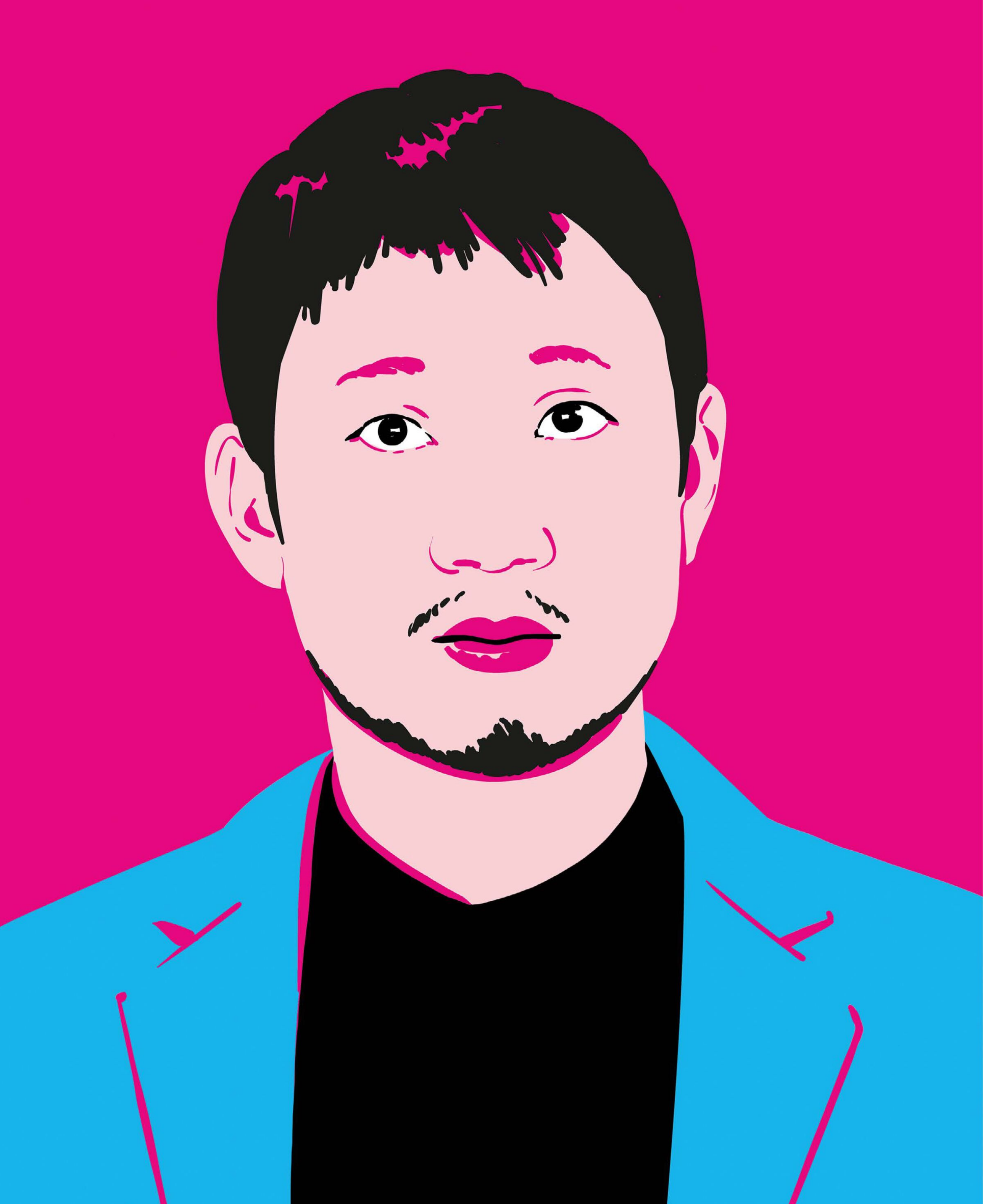

Interview by **TREVOR JOHNSTON** *Illustration by* **AGNES RICART**

Ryūsuke Hamaguchi

The Japanese director explains how he transformed a Murukami short story into the intimate emotional epic, Drive My Car .

British cinemagoers finally get a chance to catch up with Japanese director Ryūsuke Hamaguchi with his eighth feature, the Haruki Murakami adaptation *Drive My Car*, which won Best Screenplay at Cannes earlier in the year. You'd have to look to Eric Rohmer, for instance, to find another filmmaker who has balanced out intimate insights and narrative constructs with quite the same reflective impact. While 2015's 317-minute saga of thirtysomething Kobe womanhood, *Happy Hour*, remains Hamaguchi's magnum opus, the still-expansive three-hour span of *Drive My Car*, in which a theatre director works through love and loss thanks to his stoic chauffeur, is still a magnificent achievement by any measure.

LWLies: Your adaptation of 'Drive My Car' takes the nub of the Murukami short story, about a theatre director discovering more about his late wife after her death, and builds outwards. How much of that did you already have in place when you tried to get the film rights? Hamaguchi: In Japan, Murakami is legendary because he doesn't give up his rights easily. And we also knew that even if he did agree, you wouldn't be able to discuss it with him afterwards, so we sought the film rights and the right to change his work. I sent him a plot I'd already written out, which contained elements from *Drive My Car* plus additional material from two other stories in the same collection, and a significant input from Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, with a note to say that there might be further changes in the same vein. Somehow that worked.

In *Uncle Vanya* you have a play where the characters talk openly about their emotional lives, as opposed to the more reserved Japanese characters in this story – was that a way of signalling to the audience the film was going to open up these individuals, even if they seemed initially rather reticent? Precisely as you say. What's interesting about the Murakami story is that although it's written in the third person, he gives himself incredible liberty to go in and out of the character's interior monologue. That's very tough to do on film. The thing about *Vanya* is that it's full of things that people may not want to say out loud – how they're burdened by disappointment and so on – but which actually correspond to what they're feeling. It has this way of dragging out of people the emotions that lie sleeping inside of them. It works for audiences all over the world, and obviously it's useful as a metaphor here.

As I understand it, the way that Kafuku rehearses *Vanya* in the film, by getting the actors to repeat the text without emotion until they ingest it so it pays expressive dividends later on, is similar to your own working methods. How did that develop? It was something I initially did on *Happy Hour* because the cast weren't professional actors, but actually I saw it in a documentary about Jean Renoir's working methods and I decided to imitate him. It's effective up to a point, but for something like *Drive My Car* working on subtext was also really important, so I had the actors create the backstory for their characters to increase their understanding of them.

What's significant here, and a thread running through your films, is the sense that in heightened situations people 'act' for each other. It's not just on stage – they're drawing on a level of performance to get through the emotional situations in their lives? Yes, of course, there's a sense that we're all performing in our everyday lives, but I'd like to make a distinction between lies and performance, or perhaps another way of saying it, between lies and fiction. Once a lie is exposed it no longer has any validity. But with fiction there's a shared sense that even though we know it's not real, we have this shared faith in its right to exist, because desire can he brought out through fiction. *Drive My Car* is in many respects about characters who find fiction to be necessary for them to realise their own truth.

You say that, but it's also about Kafuku the theatre director deeply troubled by the idea that his wife had secrets and mysteries he'll never understand – a motif which occurs throughout your films. Is there a relevance there for a wider

“Actors need to reveal themselves in a way that seems as though it’s actually part of the character. That’s when the magic happens.”

social portrait of Japan, which always seems to me pristine on the outside, but behind the facade marked by numerous economic and ideological issues? Is Britain really any different? I travel around and everywhere I get the sense that people have things they can’t share, secrets and mysteries they withhold from the rest of their lives, and that’s what makes them as people. In a way, that explains why *Vanya*, for instance, is performed everywhere in the world, but it’s a problem when you come to acting. Somehow you need to make a connection between the secrets and mysteries the characters possess and whatever is secretive and mysterious within the actors themselves. The actors need to reveal themselves in a way that seems as though it’s actually part of the character. That’s when the magic happens.

Absolutely! The scenes with Reika Kirishima as the director’s wife Oto, telling these stories where she’s a schoolgirl breaking into someone’s house, and reliving her former life as a lamprey, are really startling. That’s especially because there’s something enigmatic and sensual which is particular to her as a performer. But how on earth did you come up with the idea of the lampreys? Oh, that’s from another story in the same collection, ‘Scheherazade’, about a woman who tells stories during sex. The start of it is from Murakami, but the later scene in the car where the young actor completes the story Oto told to him, but not her husband, is something I added as a way of further illuminating Oto’s character.

What’s amazing about that long confessional between the two men is that we lose the sense we’re actually in a car – it just seems to be floating along. Obviously, you shot a lot in and around that red Saab, but was that scene actually a studio mock-up? No, it was the real car. But the scene was 10 minutes long. Where could we go so that we weren’t going to be stopping at traffic lights in the middle of it? In the end, we shot on a motorway at night. So those were actual lights by the roadside, but even when I was shooting it the lights seemed to achieve this rhythm which was absolutely in tune with the performances. It was real but I felt I was watching a fiction.

It reminded me of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Alphaville*... Do you know that scene with the car journey, where they’re supposed to be on some futuristic highway but actually, it’s just the crew waving lights around? That was one of the first films I saw in film school and that scene in particular really struck me. I was one of my most potent early filmgoing experiences. I’ve actually shot quite a lot of stuff in cars since then, and I’m sure it’s because that Godard moment really seeped into me.

What’s the future for you? Presumably people are suggesting you should look at long-form streaming TV to explore your characters in greater depth? As long as my decisions are respected, I could be open to it, but it’s still possible for me to work for the cinema within a certain economic scale. My recent film *Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy* was shot with a crew of eight, including me. I do still think my films only achieve their full potential in the cinema. In that darkened space you’re alone with the film and alone with yourself. It gives you time to connect with the film and connect with yourself, and at the same time it’s intensified by that communal setting. That’s very important for my films and whatever I do in the future it would still be important for me that my films were also still playing in theatres

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Drive My Car

Directed by **RYÛSUKE HAMAGUCHI**
Starring **HIDETOSHI NISHIJIMA, TÔKO MIURA, REIKA KIRISHIMA**
Released **19 NOVEMBER**

ANTICIPATION. **5**
Since his 2015 film Happy Hour*, it's been bangers only from Hamaguchi.*

ENJOYMENT. **4**
A few strange plot decisions in the latter stages not enough to conceal the prominance of mastery.

IN RETROSPECT. **5**
Head-spinning in its psychological scope and

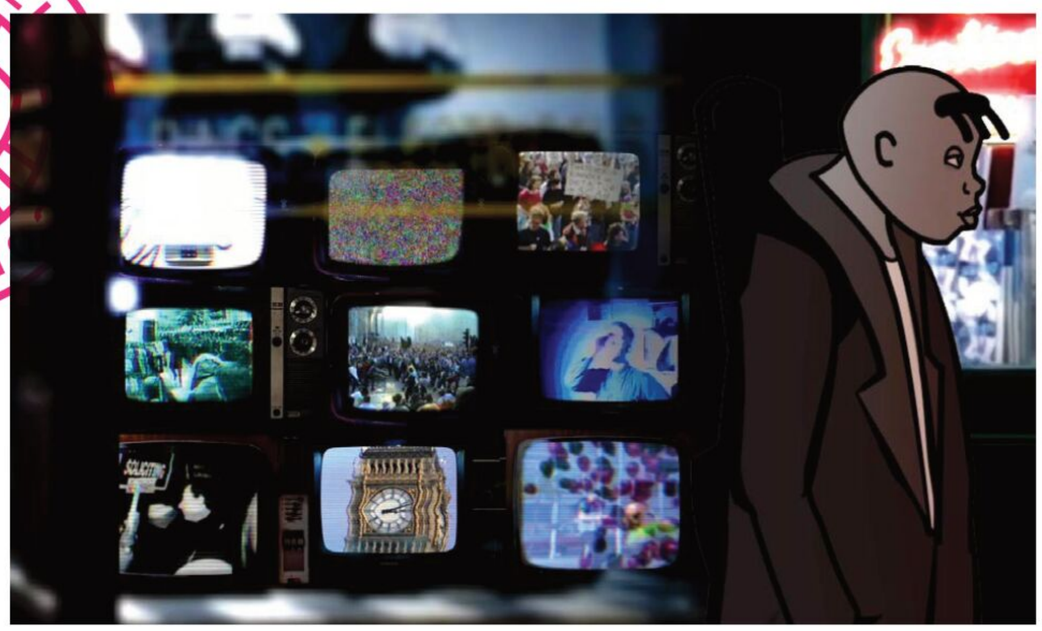
Japanese writer/director Ryūsuke Hamaguchi confirms his status as a world-class talent with this scintillating, intuitive and radical adaptation of emo godhead Haruki Murakami's melancholic short story 'Drive My Car', which featured in the 2014 collection, 'Men Without Women'. What Hamaguchi and co-writer Takamasa Oe do with this film is threefold: they dutifully haul Murakami's core text to the screen; they reform it, spin out sections and recalibrate the weight given to certain characters; and, finally, they seamlessly usher in Hamaguchi's own abiding fascinations with the ways performance permeates our everyday lives, the cathartic qualities of confession, and the inability to truly know even basic truths about our friends, lovers and acquaintances.

The opening credits drop in at around the 40-minute mark of this luxuriantly-paced three-hour opus, following an extended prologue in which meek stage actor Kafuku (Hidetoshi Nishijima) discovers that his wife, an actor and screenwriter for TV, is sleeping with one of her young stars. On the day she appears to want to confess to the husband she appears to adore, she drops dead and drags the question of her motivation, her sincerity and her true feelings with her to the grave. Flash forward two years, and Kafuku is still in a state of suppressed mourning, *en route* to Hiroshima to direct an experimental production of Chekov's *Uncle Vanya* in which all the parts are delivered in different languages (including sign). Underlying all of the narrative twists and drifting episodes is a paradoxical notion of humans having a preternatural sensitivity for communication and being alive to gesture and emotion. Yet all that seems to count for nought because what's the point in being able to communicate when no one wants to actually say anything meaningful and reveal the thoughts that remain locked up in the recesses of the soul?

The title of the film refers to Watari (Tôko Miura), the sullen, chain-smoking female driver the festival organisers have hired for Kafuku, who is very much a peripheral player for the film's opening two hours, before the pair eventually decide to open up to one another about their various woes, purging all there is to be purged in an attempt to find some kind of spiritual peace. There are some narrative revelations that feel like they've been pulled from the gaudiest of soap operas later in the game, yet Hamaguchi largely rejects the natural editing and plot rhythms of conventional movies, electing instead for opulent, broad-canvas dialogue exchanges. And rather than dragging on, each one feels perfectly calibrated and intensely engrossing, as the drama is slowly teased out of interactions rather than just dumped there as a green flag to move on to the next scene.

Drive My Car is endlessly fascinating and rich, the type of film which you could spend hours analysing and come no closer to feeling as if you've landed on its true intent. But it is not repellent and closed-off, more like a Jacques Rivette film, where a sense of sincere emotion is carefully wreathed in playfulness and wonder – like there is always something magical and otherworldly in the air despite the down-to-earth settings. **DAVID JENKINS**

Rebel Dykes



Directed by **HARRI SHANAHAN, SIÂN A WILLIAMS**
Released **26 NOVEMBER**

ANTICIPATION.
The BFI Flare hit promises to highlight the legacy of an underground radical scene.
5

ENJOYMENT.
A palpable labour of love with a robust political edge.
4

IN RETROSPECT.
A portrait of lesbian sexuality and survival that doesn't pull its punches.
4

Against a backdrop of 1980s austerity and oppression, a group of punk lesbian activists and artists meet at the Greenham Common peace camps and begin to drift towards the squats of South London. This is where punk rebellion and its disruptive spirit turn into direct action and loud protest against the silencing strategies of Section 28 and the AIDS epidemic. The punk music of the Sleeze Sisters and the Sluts from Outer Space blasts at The Bell pub in King's Cross, and the unequivocal hedonism of the '80s SM dyke scene is embraced in the erotic magazines 'Love Bites' and 'Quim'. These intersections of politics and intimacy, party and protest, allow filmmakers Harri Shanahan and Sîan Williams to produce a historical and artistic archive of a cultural history that sits outside of general knowledge.

For marginalised groups, especially in the subcultural context, access to the archive can be a major challenge. Archives are spaces of violence as well as power, so how can documentary filmmakers produce work that is politically critical of this fact while retaining a broad appeal?

The aesthetics of club culture that were so dominant in characterising the dyke subculture are aptly reflected in this videographic depiction of life as a rebel dyke squatter in the Thatcherite '80s – a time where the sex wars were raging. A vibrant SM lesbian club night called Chain Reaction becomes an intimate meeting point as well as trans-inclusive safe haven, embracing sexual performativity and renegotiating sexual relations through mutual exchanges of power based on consent.

While Greenham feminist separatists drew comparisons between militarism and everyday male violence towards women, they saw sadomasochism as a reenactment of domestic violence relationships. SM lesbians were being called violent and sexist, and this caused schisms within feminism to grow. It's impossible not to draw ties between the dangerous rhetoric of the the radical feminists of the '70s and '80s, the "lesbian sex police" as shown within the film, and the unhinged, violent ideologies of today's trans-exclusionary radical feminists. The documentary's critique of a British feminism that relies on essentialist notions of womanhood and female sexuality points to the fact that liberation movements lose all substance and texture in their inability to take difference into account.

The film juxtaposes memories of personal pleasure with experiences of deeply felt emotion. It is an invaluable community profile that finds expression in a mosaic of intimate oral histories. Mimicking the visual language of a zine, the film's DIY aesthetic is signalled through an archive of underground ephemera, a patchwork of gritty archival footage and photographs from the legendary visual artist Del La Grace Volcano, as well as original – albeit often rudimentary and misplaced – sequences of animation. By capturing the culture of fetish, party and riot, feminism, sex and politics, this unique blend of styles offers a fitting representation of a punk subculture that gave '80s queer and feminist activism its vibrancy. **MARINA ASHIOTI**

Bull

Directed by **PAUL ANDREW WILLIAMS**
Starring **NEIL MASKELL, DAVID HEYMAN, LOIS BRABIN-PLATT**
Released **5 NOVEMBER**

With the exception of the coming-of-age drama, the revenge thriller must be the most well-worn story template in all of cinema. There's nothing inherently wrong with using revenge as a protagonist's primary motivation but there needs to be something unique about the way it's depicted to properly pique audience interest.

With *Bull*, write/director Paul Andrew Williams's USP is the gruesome, unflinching manner in which his title character metes out punishment to the former friends and family who have wronged him. Neil Maskell plays the brooding Bull, a former enforcer in a vicious criminal crew led by his father-in-law Norm (David Heyman, delightfully unpleasant). Through a series of flashbacks we gradually that learn Bull's relationship with Norm's daughter Gemma (Lois Brabin-Platt) evidently collapsed at least partly because of her heroin use and an affair with one of Bull's colleagues. Bull wanted custody of their son Aiden but nothing to do with Gemma. Norm, as the archetypal villainous patriarch, was never going to allow that. A decade after a horrific event that suggests Norm has killed either Bull, Aiden or both, Bull makes a return and no one will be spared.

Cinematographers Ben Chads and Vanessa Whyte are often as unsparing as Bull himself. We see close-ups of stabbings, a limb being amputated, fingers being severed and shootings. The violence is stomach-churning but effective. Bull has no problem employing the methods he used while working for Norm on his old colleagues. Visually, the pain inflicted by Bull and a repeated image of a caravan burning are of most significance. While the film is well-shot, with the queasy faces of Bull's victims telling a story of impending and continuing horror, geographically it is somewhat anonymous.

Maskell is as dependable as ever, masterfully going up through the gears of rage as need dictates. His skill as an actor lies in being fully believable as the bloke who'd cheerfully join you for a pint, but also the one who would glass you when he finished his. The rest of the cast are fine but it's Maskell's film and perhaps his best performance since *Kill List*, even if the Ben Wheatley film *Bull* most recalls is *Down Terrace*.

Things run out of steam towards the end with a couple of superfluous scenes and it would have been interesting to have had some clear justification for Gemma's behaviour that kicked things off – was she tired of the overall life of crime or was Bull himself specifically at fault for her narcotic slide? That said, Williams and Maskell have delivered an effective, savage revenge thriller – as long as one's expectations are moderate.

LOU THOMAS

ANTICIPATION. 3
Neil Maskell dispensing bloody justice? Could be a giggle.

ENJOYMENT. 3
Great lead performance, startling violence, but little more than that.

IN RETROSPECT. 3
Perfectly watchable but not for the squeamish (or demanding).

Passing

Directed by **REBECCA HALL**
Starring **TESSA THOMPSON, RUTH NEGGA, ANDRÉ HOLLAND**
Released **29 OCTOBER**

The 1929 novel 'Passing' by Nella Larsen tells of two Black female acquaintances who, due to the light palour of their skin, are able to "pass" as white at the height of the Jim Crow era. Its story unfurls in the marginally progressive environs of New York, where racism has become something of a game, albeit one that is still able to evoke great anger and violence. This is not really a story about subterfuge or trickery – the idea that certain Black people have a way of getting one over their white oppressors simply by praying on blindness and ignorance. It's more about options for survival and what it means for a Black person to enter into what is perceived as the promised land of white largesse and freedom.

Needless to say, this dizzyingly rich and layered novel – an inarguable 20th century classic – seems like a tough prospect for screen adaptation, its gorgeous prose beset with traps and tripwires. The narrative is straightforward enough, but the psychological motivations, the peculiarities of New York geography and the sweeping historical context mean that the intimacy at its core speaks to more unpalatable truths. Rebecca Hall has chosen to take on the book as her debut as writer-director, and manages to channel a decent number of its stark complexities as well as delivering an involving drama.

We join Tessa Thompson's well-to-do Reenie as she decides to wet her whistle at a ritzy Manhattan hotel, where she is recognised by Ruth Negga's glamorous and ostentatious Clare. The pair strike up a conversation, decide to decamp to Clare's room for cocktails where it's revealed that she has been passing as white as a way to transcend the limited social mobility afforded to people of colour. She's gotten herself hitched to a dapper gent who's also a virulent racist (Alexander Skarsgård), so despite the smiles and the spritz, her life is in fact a ticking time bomb. Clare sees Reenie as the route back to her old life, but the combustible climate makes it an impossible journey.

Hall's reflective and challenging film is formally stripped back and places much of the emotional heavy lifting on the shoulders of its two formidable leads. Negga, in particular, brings tragic Fitzgeraldian depths to Clare where vivacity and confidence only partially mask feelings of total isolation. The handsome black-and-white photography has been used to make the film feel old timey, but also serves to emphasise the central ruse. Sometimes the filmmaking doesn't quite do enough to elicit the requisite intensity from some key conversations, but it certainly lands its most important punch, which arrives at the devastating climax. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. 3
The novel is a masterpiece of ambiguity, which could be tough to bring to a screen adaptation.

ENJOYMENT. 4
Impressive work from Rebecca Hall and her two leads, Tessa Thompson and Ruth Negga.

IN RETROSPECT. 4
A tragedy that's more squalid than it is grandiose, and is all the more moving for it.

Interview by **RŌGAN GRAHAM** *Illustration by* **AGNES RICART**

Rebecca Hall

The British actor on her motivations for taking on a literary classic as her directorial debut: Nella Larsen's 'Passing'.

From her breakout role in Woody Allen's *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* to blockbusters, dramas and genre films of all stripes, Rebecca Hall has done it all. Now she has decided to turn her hand to writing and directing, with her debut feature *Passing,* an adapation of Nella Larsen's celebrated 1929 novel about two Black women (played by Tessa Thompson and Ruth Negga) who decide to pass as white due to their light skin.

LWLies: Did adapting this material intimidate you at all? Hall: Whether I just did this as a release valve or not I've got no idea, but at the time I was like, 'Well, I'm never going to make this into a film', because it's period and it's incredibly nuanced and it's a great work of literature and I haven't made a film before. At the time I was 25, so I thought, 'I'm just doing this for me.' So, the adaptation was very fast. The first draft came out in about 10 days and it was very pickled. I read the book once, shut it and then wrote without looking. I could see it distilled in my mind. And then go I went to the book and took pieces out and so on. But I wasn't intimidated because I didn't think anyone would see it.

The Harlem Renaissance is such a rich period, you would think that it wouldn't take almost a hundred years for this to be adapted. She wrote it, what, 92 years ago, and there should have been a movie immediately. I love black-and-white movies from the '30s and '40s; there was a huge precedent for stories about interpersonal relationships between two women, and two women centering a story. But they were obviously white women, it was Barbara Stanwyck and Bette Davis.

By highlighting the class tension between Irene and her maid you add a layer of moral ambiguity to the story. Everyone assumes that Irene was the moral authority and the book was a straightforward 'telling someone off' for passing, and then they get their comeuppance at the end. And that's not true, because the person that you are with in the book also becomes the person that the novel very subtly teaches you not to trust. Finding a filmic language to sort of let that creep up on the audience and sit with you, I found to be the biggest challenge.

Could you talk about your visual influences for the film? I watched the Hitchcock film *Shadow of a Doubt,* and Joseph Losey's *The Servant,* which I love because it's so claustrophobic. I was also inspired by photographers; I looked at a lot of James Van Der Zee portraiture. Edu [Eduard Grau], the DP, and I looked a lot at Saul Leiter photographs because we were very interested in trying to find a kind of blurriness around the edges of this world. Something that I always talked to all the heads of the department about was that I don't believe film has to be reality. I think it's definitionally poetry, but it does have to have emotional truth. What we're making is an expressionistic film, otherwise you can't get to the nuance of the novel. Because it's all about the grey area, and part of the reason why I shot it black-and-white is that there's nothing black and white about the story.

How did you find working with the cast? Ruth and Tessa were nothing short of a dream for a director. I'm a real believer in casting right and letting actors do their thing, not least because I've had experience of that myself. But it's a tricky balance. My whole life has been an experience of watching the different ways that different directors navigate that because even in my childhood I was sat in rehearsal rooms watching my father do it.

Ruth is spectacular and this was her part in a way that I had no understanding of before I met her. I initially thought that she would want to play Irene, and then she said to me 'No, you've got to let me play Clare'. It was just something about it spoke to her so completely. And Tessa, in many ways it's the less flashy part, it doesn't call attention to itself so much, but it is an unbelievably hard performance to pull off. She's constrained, she's holding it together all the time. That means as a performer you've got to play two things simultaneously: you've got to play the external projection of someone who is holding everything together but you've also got to find a way to tell the audience that you're not holding it together at all. I think both of their performances are nothing short of miracles

The Card Counter

Directed by **PAUL SCHRADER**
Starring **OSCAR ISAAC, TIFFANY HADDISH, TYE SHERIDAN**
Released **5 NOVEMBER**

ANTICIPATION. 4
Paul Schrader's follow-up to one of his best films in years, First Reformed.

ENJOYMENT. 4
Lots of great stuff here, but this is first and foremost the Oscar Isaac show.

IN RETROSPECT. 4
The most "you do you" film this spiritually cynical writer/director could make.

Here are the rules for *The Card Counter* drinking game: when you see a character take a drink in the film, you have to match them. Tom Collins with Tanqueray. Double Jack Daniels. Double Johnnie Walker. Manhattan. Soda water. Beer. First you get that buzz which turns to mild euphoria, then the nasties kick in and the sickness starts to rise.

It emulates the experience of watching Paul Schrader's rollocking new spin on his God's Lonely Man project, this time focusing on Bill Tillich (aka William Tell), played by Oscar Isaac (easily his best performance since *Inside Llewyn Davis*), a man with a past who just likes to wrap his table lamps in bed sheets and play a bit of poker.

With his slicked back hair, omnipresent donkey jacket, khaki-green slacks and oversized Ray-Bans, he's a Melvillian ex-con who ended up enjoying his time in chokey where he caught up on his Marcus Aurelius and taught himself to count cards. He now seems to want to emulate the claustrophobic experience of incarceration on the outside: turning every day into a droningly monotonous trip from one tinpot casino to the next where he keeps his head down, bets small, wins small and is able to keep himself to himself.

Visually, Schrader shoots for extreme asceticism, with casino floors made to resemble the gun-metal austerity of a prison rec room. And that's just how William likes it – no muss, no fuss, in, out and on to the next one. That is until he wanders into a security conference and sits in on a presentation delivered by retired Major John Gordo (Willem Dafoe), an old acquaintance from his past. Tye Sheridan's schlubby twentysomething Cirk with a "C" (aka The Kid) recognises William and passes him his deets. Turns out he's got crosshairs trained on Gordo and needs some extra capital to achieve a fantasy kill.

As with most of Schrader's work – but specifically his excellent 2017 film *First Reformed* – the French formalist filmmaker Robert Bresson is a key influence, mainly in the puritanical rigour of the storytelling and the performances, but also in how it grapples with the mystifying and contradictory aspects of morality.

It's a supremely compelling tale leavened by its wry humour and a subtle commentary on the essential emptiness of American life. Indeed, the only truly successful characters in the film are one of William's regular poker opponents, a Ukrainian man styled as Mr USA who, along with a pair of lackeys, chants, "U-S-A! U-S-A!" everywhere he's seen. Tiffany Haddish turns in a fine performance as a svelte circuit regular, and draws out an unlikely strain of poignancy from the otherwise samurai-focused Bill.

A crackerjack finale leads to the film's bittersweet final shot, which references Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel fresco 'The Creation of Adam' and encapsulates so much about Schrader's cinema, in everything from way back to the days of *Taxi Driver*. It's that idea of transcendence and purity remaining just out of reach. The fingers almost connect, but they never do.

DAVID JENKINS

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LITTLE WHITE LIES

"A PROFOUNDLY BEAUTIFUL FILM"

★★★★★

TELEGRAPH

A **RYUSUKE HAMAGUCHI** FILM

DRIVE MY CAR

HIDETOSHI NISHIJIMA　TOKO MIURA　REIKA KIRISHIMA　MASAKI OKADA

ドライブ・マイ・カー

BASED ON THE SHORT STORY
BY **HARUKI MURAKAMI**

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Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn

Directed by **RADU JUDE**
Starring **KATIA PASCARIU, CLAUDIA IEREMIA, OLIMPIA MALAI**
Released **26 NOVEMBER**

Filmed at the height of the pandemic, this new film from prodigious Romanian satiricist Radu Jude follows a school teacher facing scandal after a sex tape appears online starring herself and her husband. The video's appearance raises a number of questions: Where lies the line between public and private, and what issues arise when the distinction is shown to be unclear? What is to be defined as obscene or immoral and who gets to dictate this? Are there situations in which censorship is justifiable, or is it a slippery slope to greater suppressions?

With a narrative split into three sections, Jude doesn't attempt to resolve any of these questions, instead it prods and pokes at each, opening up further provocations and lines of inquiry. The first part sees the teacher Emi (Katia Pascariu) wander around downtown Bucharest, attending to various chores and becoming increasingly flustered by the varying pandemic-related impediments, arguments, and frustrations she encounters, all of which are usurped by the more immediate problem of a parent teacher association who want to see her imprudence met with punishment. Skipping to the third part, we see the staging of a kangaroo trial wherein the parents of Emi's students debate the exact nature of the transgression, deciding whether or not she should keep her job. Bisecting these two dramatic sequences is a bravura essayistic midsection that sees Jude cycle through an A to Z of Romanian words of his choosing. In this, quotations, trivia, one-liners, visual gags, and other non sequiturs are accompanied by a mix of archive materials, social media clips and new short sequences filmed using the actors from the other parts recast into new transient roles.

All the sections are different but each offers something to chew on. The first exposes tensions within Romanian society, seeing citizens inciting and insulting one another, aggravated by a pandemic that has brought previously sublimated social and ideological stratifications into plain sight. The second charts historical injustices, using ironic detachment to present a probing record of human wrongdoing, hypocrisy, and exploitation over time. The last part uses its characters as avatars to display the prejudices of people of all sorts of systems of conservative belief, and challenge the idea that individual acts of impropriety should be condemned when corruption and violence at a state or church level is permitted to continue. An overflow of energy and ideas, what it all amounts to is never exactly clear. This is no issue though, as this is an experimental film in the truest sense of the word. Here, faced with many barriers, a director is experimenting with the film form itself, taking apart all the tools at his disposal and smashing together their raw components to forge something new. **MATT TURNER**

ANTICIPATION. 4
A new work from a brave and unruly filmmaker whose next direction is always unknowable.

ENJOYMENT. 4
Moment by moment this seems chaotic, but by the end all of the parts come together.

IN RETROSPECT. 4
Unpredictable, irreverent, and frequently infantile, but also somehow very erudite too.

The Hand of God

Directed by **PAOLO SORRENTINO**
Starring **FILIPPO SCOTTI, TONI SERVILLO, TERESA SAPONANGELO**
Released **19 NOVEMBER**

ANTICIPATION. 4
Always interested in the next glossy beast from Sorrentino.

ENJOYMENT. 4
One hell of an emotional sweep.

IN RETROSPECT. 3
Lovely and jarring in equal measure. The man needs to step back from Fellini homaging.

Paolo Sorrentino loves breasts. This is striking to anyone who has watched *The Great Beauty*, *Youth* or *Loro*, in which naked female flesh is as integral to his set decoration as whooshing dolly shots are to his cinematic language. Amongst other things, *The Hand of God* is the story of the patient zero of boobs, which belong to Patrizia (Luisa Ranieri) aunt to the Chalamet-esque protagonist, Fabietto Schisa (Filippo Scotti). This Naples-set coming-of-age story is a portrait of the artist Sorrentino as a young man, before and after a tragedy of worst-possible-nightmare-so-couldn't-really-happen proportions replaces boisterous family life with a lonelier path.

We're introduced to the sprawl of the Schisa family through Patrizia one night as she waits in a long queue for the bus that's never coming while wearing a white strappy dress – braless, naturally. A limo creeps up beside her, containing a strange old man who knows all about her and whisks her away to see 'the little monk', a local urban legend who can, apparently, make dreams come true. As a result of this unexpected detour, Patrizia is late home and her husband flies off the handle.

Cut to Fabietto on a scooter with mum Maria (Teresa Saponangelo) and dad Saveria (Toni Servillo), roaring through the night, cracking jokes. Theirs is a bubble of good vibes despite being *en route* to a scene of domestic violence. Saponangelo and Servillo cause mini lightning storms of delight for every moment they're on screen, even in scenes that are otherwise hard to parse. Completing the family is older brother Marchino (Marlon Joubert), an aspiring actor who loses his ambition after Fellini – whose presence looms large off-screen – tells him he looks like a waiter from Amarcuri.

Like the sport played by the icon hanging over its title, *The Hand of God* is a game of two halves. In the first, there is rarely a quiet moment in vignettes that span Maria's incorrigble appetite for pranks, brotherly bonding, such Marchino asking Fabietto to choose between having sex with Patrizia and Maradona being signed by Naples and – more weightily – the discovery of an affair. An extended family is drawn crassly, with Sorrentino othering physical difference, reaching for cheap jokes that are clearly inspired by Fellini, and yet Fellini himself could not have carried them off in today's world.

Still, the dynamic of the central four is a pleasure incarnate. Equal parts funny and warm, each actor brings a specific dynamism that, when combined with the rest, crackles with life and love. Time passes like a rippling summer breeze in a mode that does not quite equal the cinema of Mia Hansen-Løve but is comparable to the way she makes forward momentum feel like a delicate pleasure. Then comes the transformative incident. The film quietens down and in Fabietto's words, "I don't like reality any more." *The Hand of God* is the autobiographical origins story of a filmmaker that exhudes the warm intimacy that such personal storytelling enables. It's this intimacy that coaxes audiences in-the-know to be forgiving over gauche streaks, such as Sorrentino's view of female flesh as either sleekly pornographic or ridiculously grotesque. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

You Will Die at 20

Directed by **AMJAD ABU ALALA**
Starring **MUSTAFA SHEHATA, MAHMOUD MAYSARA ELSARAJ, ISLAM MUBARAK**
Released **12 NOVEMBER**

Without meaning to sound glib, Amjad Abu Alala's emotionally tortuous feature debut plays like a classic movie about teen angst, in which a brooding youngster becomes obsessed with the prospect of his untimely demise. Its story doesn't play out in some grey Western suburbia, rather a far-flung Sudanese village wrought from glowing sandstone in which our brooding hero Muzamil (Mustafa Shehata) must carry the existential weight of a death sentence handed down to him while just a babe. The doomsday clock applied to this boy's life is the result of a whirling dervish who topples over at a traditional ceremony and then counts to 20 – onlookers assume the meaning to be that Mumazil will die at the moment he reaches that age.

The film avoids hyperbole in its thoughtful, philosophical exploration of young life saddled with a finite expiry date, pondering whether it should be an excuse for exuberance and gorging on life experience, or perhaps sitting tight and trying your best to ward off the incoming curse. At times it's a little too ponderous, and sometimes stuggles to bring variation and surprise to its runtime. Yet this laconic, meditative drama muses on the nature of time and the revelation that, even though Muzamil's predicament seems highly unlikely to the rational onlooker, the knowledge he accrues is pertinent to all mortals.
DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION 4
A sadly all-too-rare chance to catch a new work from Sudan on the big screen.

ENJOYMENT 3
Spirited and philosophical, if perhaps a little too laconic at times.

IN RETROSPECT 4
Its quiet profundity strikes you hours, days after viewing.

Blue Bayou

Directed by **JUSTIN CHON**
Starring **JUSTIN CHON, ALICIA VIKANDER, MARK O'BRIEN**
Released **3 DECEMBER**

There's no doubt that the subject matter at the heart of Justin Chon's *Blue Bayou* is compelling and prescient – it focuses on the injustice of foreign-born adoptees in the United States being deported due to a legal loophole as a result of the Child Citizenship Act of 2000. Despite having spent the majority of their lives in America with no family or life in their native country (and potentially having endured abuse at the hands of their adoptive families) these people are forced to endure lengthy and expensive legal battles, else accept deportation. For Antonio LeBlanc (played by Chon) this means leaving behind his pregnant wife Kathy (Alicia Vikander), adoptive daughter Jessie (Sydney Kowalske) and his job as a tattoo artist, after the immigration department rule he must leave America for his native South Korea – a country Antonio has no relationship with. Chon gives a strong performance as Antonio, and the supporting players are equally charming, but the script is weak and often clichéd, featuring a tangle of subplots which don't quite mesh. Advocacy group Adoptees for Justice claim *Blue Bayou* utilises real-life stories without consent and have called for an apology from the director who's heart appears to be in the right place by highlighting this devastating issue of displaced adoptees. But his execution is heavy-handed, with the ending steering into a mawkish spectacle which undercuts the seriousness of the topic at hand. **HANNAH STRONG**

ANTICIPATION 3
Chon is a promising but slightly inconsistent talent.

ENJOYMENT 2
Ambitious but inelegantly executed.

IN RETROSPECT 2
A documentary would have better served the real-life adoptees who face this issue.

Lamb

Directed by **VALDIMAR JÓHANNSSON**
Starring **NOOMI RAPACE, HILMIR SNÆR GUÐNASON**
Released **24 JULY**

In the beautiful but harsh Icelandic countryside, María (Noomi Rapace) and her husband Ingvar (Hilmir Snær Guðnason) tend to their sheep farm in relative harmony. The work is hard and the days are long, but the couple seem content enough – until a shocking discovery among their flock offers them both a gift and a curse. The fable-like quality of Valdimar Jóhannsson's feature debut is evident in this premise alone, as a childless couple yearn for a baby to call their own, only to fall prey to the old adage 'be careful what you wish for.' Their unexpected arrival, Ada, is an unconventional child who they must keep secret from the world – a situation complicated by the arrival of Ingvar's reckless brother Pétur (Björn Hlynur Haraldsson) who is attracted to María.

With its glacial pace and sparse dialogue, Jóhannsson creates a dreamlike atmosphere, leaning into the perception of Iceland as an austere and mystical land. It's to Rapace's credit that the film works at all – she is its heart and soul, and is capable of portraying great tenderness one moment and cold brutality the next. *Lamb*'s premise is intriguing too – a pleasing twist on the familiar horror trope of monstrous motherhood. Even so, the imaginative conceit is let down by a rather sudden and underwhelming climax. It's a bold arrival for Jóhannsson all the same, and refreshing to see Rapace granted a role outside of her more traditional action fare. **HANNAH STRONG**

ANTICIPATION
Have we reached peak A24 "elevated horror"? **3**

ENJOYMENT
Visually engrossing but a tad too languid. **3**

IN RETROSPECT
Refreshing work from Rapace even if the film itself isn't perfect. **3**

Lapwing

Directed by **PHILIP STEVENS**
Starring **HANNAH DOUGLAS, SEBASTIAN DE SOUZA, EMMETT J SCANLAN**
Released **26 NOVEMBER**

A faraway beachside encampment, somewhere in Tudor England, and toxic masculinity is running rife among the men and women of this fair isle. *Lapwing* is debutant Philip Stevens' film of Laura Turner's script, and its themes of domination, gaslighting and psychological abuse across gender lines could apply to any place or any time. At the centre of all this is Emmett J Scanlan's David, a knife-wielding, beady-eyed confidence trickster who has set up a scheme to secure passage to those looking to flee the country. As they wait for a boat to arrive (will it ever?), the mute Patience (Hannah Douglas) connects with a strapping yet tender Egyptian wanderer named Rumi (Sebastian de Souza), and when David catches wind of their union, well, it sends him on a foaming rampage.

Though the film is unapologetically violent, its female protagonists have enough agency and fortitude to bring some surprising twists to the brew. The power that David holds over his followers is convincingly wrought through a shouted word salad of suspicion and false equivalence, even if the dialogue, with its constant effing and blinding, occasionally feels too anachronistic and modern. Visually and dramatically, the film doesn't reinvent any wheels, nor does it set out too, instead happy to splice together a satisfyingly intense period drama with some nice moments of genre pay-off. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION
Low-budget British period drama with some light genre trappings. Give it a go... **3**

ENJOYMENT
Low on originality, but the performers are wholly committed and that sees the film through. **3**

IN RETROSPECT
Will be nice to see what Stevens and Turner go on to do next. **3**

C’mon, C’mon

Directed by **MIKE MILLS**
Starring **JOAQUIN PHOENIX, WOODY NORMAN, GABY HOFFMANN**
Released **19 NOVEMBER**

Kids can be safely relied on to say the darnedest things, and in Mike Mills’ latest feature, indeed they do. But they also say everything else – the funniest things, the saddest things, the strangest things, the most wondrous things. Precocious little Jesse (cherubic Woody Norman) often manages all of this at the same time, his youthful lack of filter combining with his born sensitivity in such remarks as when he informs uncle Johnny (Joaquin Phoenix) that the man’s not very good at expressing his emotions.

The deceptive maturity of children, when played against the limits of how much an adult can fairly expect on that front, makes for gentle drama in Mills’ study of a hurting family’s unconventional healing. Johnny has built his career around the concept that our offspring know more than we realise, though he has none of his own; Phoenix portrays the host of a radio show who travels the country interviewing young people about their lives. On paper, he’s the ideal temporary guardian for Jesse once Johnny’s sister Viv (Gaby Hoffmann) needs some time for help bipolar husband Paul (Scoot McNairy) through an episode of instability. But all Johnny’s curiosity and empathy can’t prepare him for the practical challenges of time management in childrearing, or the possibility that Jesse may have inherited some of his father’s behavioral patterns.

This falls into the tradition of movies about closed-off guys learning to feel from the innocents left in their charge, but Mills skirts triteness by softening Phoenix’s usual intensity. He’s not starting from a place of emotional rigidity, as made clear in his treatment of the subjects in his polite, studied recording sessions. Instead, he’s merely a bit sad and lonely, two inner holes filled with the energising purpose of surrogate parenthood.

The black-and-white photography is Mills’ big formal choice, its effect not disagreeable despite hard-to-discern motivations. In practice, cinematographer Robbie Ryan’s monochrome has a way of making disparate pockets of America look unified, despite the location shooting bringing out their individual beauty.

Jesse has an odd pre-bedtime routine of pretending that he’s an orphan, talking about the contemptible conditions at his orphanage, and asking if he can’t stay the night in his own bed. It weirds Johnny out the first time he sees it, and the audience is right there with him, but we both come to understand the rationale. In this film full of people hesitant to open themselves up, acceptance becomes a naked plea that demands to be made every day. The tone never defines the stakes in such grave terms, but that’s the key to the potency of Mills’ cinema: life’s pivotal turns come in idle moments, from inconspicuous sources. All it takes is the willingness to listen. **CHARLES BRAMESCO**

ANTICIPATION. 4
Five years since Mike Mills’ last feature is entirely too long.

ENJOYMENT. 4
With results like these, he can take as much time as he needs.

IN RETROSPECT. 4
Truth, from the mouths of babes.

The Power of the Dog

Directed by **JANE CAMPION**
Starring **BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH, KODI SMIT-MCPHEE, KIRSTEN DUNST**
Released **24 JULY**

ANTICIPATION. 5
The first Jane Campion film in 12 years is headline news.

ENJOYMENT. 4
If it wasn't for the infernal theatrics of Cumberbatch this would have been sublime.

IN RETROSPECT. 5
A visually magnificent, psychologically tense western with themes for the ages.

The year is 1925. Phil (Benedict Cumberbatch) owns a ranch in Montana with his brother George (Jesse Plemons). Nearby, recently widowed Rose (Kirsten Dunst) is trying to survive with her son Peter (Kodi Smit-McPhee) by running a small restaurant. One visit from the Burbanks later and Rose has a new husband in George and a new enemy in Phil. "Hello, brother Phil," says Rose on entering her new home, the dark and well-appointed Burbank ranch. "I'm not your brother, you're a cheap schemer," he says, as her face crumples.

Dunst does emotional heavy lifting as a character who has trouble speaking, showing ragged and devastated emotions as Phil finds new ways to torture her. This is a man's world and a man's film – still, the matter of her wellbeing gives heart to the story and motivates key events. These powers, such as they are, do not serve her. The wild landscapes of Central Otago in New Zealand (standing in for Montana) are vast, beautiful and lonely. She is trapped. Jonny Greenwood's heavy grind-of-a-score adds to this atmosphere of claustrophobia.

Campion slowly extricates the individual elements of her tale, with the same methodical precision that Peter – a medical student – uses to dissect a bunny rabbit. Striking images leap off the screen, such as Peter's lanky figure rotating a hula hoop around his hips at dusk. He is a delicate boy who can make roses out of paper. Phil uses one such paper rose to light a cigarette, then throws its charred remains into a water jug, where it hisses. The next shot shows Rose in the next room framed by a glass door pane, reacting to this destruction with pain.

The film is powered by the slow-burn enigma of who Phil and Peter are. They initially present as two male archetypes in conflict: the macho man versus the effete boy, yet each is composed of layers. The shedding of these continuously alters the chemistry of their relationship creating a power struggle that makes the third act of the film utterly gripping and hard to predict. The queer subtext of Savage's book is dialled up, infusing the tension between the two with a sensuality that adds one more factor to the mystery of how this relationship will play out.

Smit-McPhee acts Cumberbatch off the screen. The latter's thespy instincts and over-baked accent ("Well, ain't that purdy") are no match for his co-star's compelling subtlety. Indeed, Smit-McPhee is more effective at showing inner life than Cumberbatch who, for all his grandstanding, is strangely opaque. The off-putting elements of his performance become less distracting as the film goes on, yet this reviewer spent time while watching thinking of recast options (Cosmo Jarvis? Tom Hardy?)

The Power of the Dog is brilliant and ambitious enough to absorb this imperfection. Campion is a master of intertwining character and plot, so that a revelation of one nudges the other along. In this, her first film centring male psychology after a career of female character studies, she makes observations about masculinity and power that defy classification. She has blown these subjects wide open and we can but stand still and try to catch the fragments as they rain down. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

Spencer

Directed by **PABLO LARRAÍN**
Starring **KRISTEN STEWART, TIMOTHY SPALL, SALLY HAWKINS**
Released **5 NOVEMBER**

With films such as *Tony Manero* and *Post Mortem*, Chilean filmmaker Pablo Larraín has made a name for himself as a purveyor of bleak surveys of life under dictatorship conditions that foreground terror, oppression and sudden violence. With *Spencer*, his strange psychological fable about the late Diana Spencer over an especially tense Christmas season at the royal Sandringham estate, he presents the British monarchy as a daffy totalitarian enclave, steeped in traditions which only serve to extend their old world shelf life and filter them out from the plebs. It is an understatement to say that many living royals – including the current regent – do not come off well in this film.

The little white mouse in the maze of inhumane heritage thinking is Kristen Stewart's perfectly-accented and effortlessly glamorous Diana, and the film charts her various strained attempts to break free of these stifling conditions. There are wicked whispers that she has "cracked", and even the curtains have been sewn shut to stop the paparazzi from spying on her. The placement of a biography of Anne Boleyn by her bedside leads to spectral visions of the beheaded damsel, and the film asks us to question whether Diana's frayed mindset is justified under the circumstances.

The script by Steven Knight is problematic from the get-go, packed with lots of winking pop psychology and on-the-nose portent, and clearly written with future tragedy in mind. Its main infraction, though, is that it is often witless and banal, leaving Larraín and the actors to heroically milk the drama from a string of interactions that are either overstuffed with "meaning", or just deathly dull.

Unlike the maelstrom of emotions in Larraín's previous, and similarly-calibrated celebrity portrait pic, *Jackie*, this one is slower, linear and more austere, better to fit the genteel and regimented-to-death context of a Yuletide with Her Maj. On paper Stewart seemed like an eccentric casting choice, yet she slinks into the material with grace and ease, and her trademark arsenal of half-met glares and anxiety-dashed grimaces perfectly express her desperate yearning to be free of prettified toff prison.

The film recalls both Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, in its elegantly decked-out dissection of cloistered entitlement, and Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, in its depiction of a person being driven stir crazy by her claustrophobic surroundings (as well as being bullied by her husband). The latter comparison is emphasised by Jonny Greenwood's expressive but sometimes heavy-handed score which deftly combines prim, dinnertime *minuets* with clanging atonal dirges. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. 3
Loved 2016's Jackie *but gotta say, from all angles this one looks well dodge.*

ENJOYMENT. 3
Both good and bad in surprising ways. Dire script, but Stewart brings it in the lead.

IN RETROSPECT. 2
Hard to fathom how or why this film is as beloved by critics as it is.

Petite Maman

Directed by **CÉLINE SCIAMMA**
Starring **JOSÉPHINE SANZ, GABRIELLE SANZ, NINA MEURISSE**
Released **19 NOVEMBER**

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," wrote French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in 1949. Seventy years on, her observation about gender identity holds true – and finds form in *Petite Maman*, a gentle drama about daughterhood by French writer/director Céline Sciamma. It's set predominately in a modest house, with a small cast that opts for subtlety, but this is no simple, traditional nor literal coming-of-age tale. By welcoming the benevolent shadow-self lurking behind de Beauvoir's quote – that is, the adult who carries their childhood inside them like a pearl – *Petite Maman* becomes a profound meditation on inheritance.

Walking the halls of an aged care home, bidding formal farewells to the residents, Nelly (Joséphine Sanz) bears the curse of the gifted kid: she is both knowing and lonely beyond her eight years. Her grandmother has just died, and her mother (Nina Meurisse) is elsewhere – emotionally, at first, then geographically, departing under the cover of night to parse her sorrow unseen. This leaves Nelly and her dad (Stéphane Varupenne) to pack up Grandmother's house in the country.

Out wandering in the woods, Nelly meets her double (played by Gabrielle Sanz, Joséphine's twin). The children are alike in height, age, chestnut hair and practical dress, but Nelly's new friend shares her mum's name, Marion. By all appearances, the little girl yearned so much to know her mother, she travelled back in time to make it happen.

Petite Maman is enchanting, with potency beyond its whimsical premise. Though it may read, on paper, as an unsettling fairy tale or sci-fi flight, the final product is grounded in pleasant naturalism. As in the auteur's previous films, including *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* and *Girlhood*, young women here search for home in other people, and come alive in the absence of authority. Nelly and Marion's joyful bond is brightest when they roam free – their mischief unadulterated by a parent's watchful eye, and fortified by the Sanz siblings' effortless intimacy. Peas in a pod, they sport the same lopsided waddle and endearing grin, but even at its sweetest, *Petite Maman* is never mushy. This is Sciamma, after all, whose body of work responds to the strictures of heteronormativity, gender performance and prescriptive social roles.

Curiously, *Petite Maman* comes at the topic sidelong, combing through the tangled curls of motherhood, obligation and fate. But it knows that growing pains last a lifetime – sometimes longer, if you inherit those of your forebears – and promises to hold your hand throughout.

AIMEE KNIGHT

ANTICIPATION. 4
Where we're going, we don't need flux capacitors.

ENJOYMENT. 5
A time travel tale fuelled by grief's blue flame.

IN RETROSPECT. 5
Oh, the burden of being your mother's daughter.

Interview by **LILLIAN CRAWFORD** *Illustration by* **AGNES RICART**

Céline Sciamma

The French maestro on how she's matured as a filmmaker, and the secrets hidden in her beguiling latest, Petite Maman.

Following her international hit film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, Céline Sciamma returns to her roots with her fifth feature, *Petite Maman*. Starring twin sisters Joséphine and Gabrielle Sanz as daughter and mother Nelly and Marion, the film presents the time-loop premise with naturalism and authenticity. It's also a return to some of Sciamma's regular themes: coming-of-age, grief and goodbyes, but also crucially the power of empathy across generations of women.

LWLies: *Petite Maman* opens with Nelly's perspective and we follow her closely. What was it like for you to return to a child's focus? Why does that worldview appeal to you?. Sciamma: I used to answer this question about films with kids very differently because I was doing coming-of-age stories while I was coming of age. When I started writing *Petite Maman* I realised that kids are just characters, they're great characters and it's their perspective that I find attractive for cinema. I wanted to give them full credit as individuals and to treat them exactly the same as adults. I think they work so well for cinema because they care a lot. Questions from a child can always be so much more troubling and there's such a strong pressure because it's the greatest desire to know, understand, and feel. Looking at something is so important and the desire to understand someone is so important.

The costumes feel timeless and it's interesting that you used an original piece for the 'music of the future' at the end. Did you not want to tie the film to any specific time? Yeah, you've got the logic right. It's time travelling without a machine so it's very natural. I really wanted the film to be something everybody could connect to. Someone who was a child in the 1960s and someone in 2020 can connect and that's their story too. It means that there are 40-year-old women, grown-ups, going to the film, then going with their mother, being the kid, and then going with their own daughter. That's the utopia of the film, I guess.

When I was writing, I was obsessed with the idea that we would feel our body differently and logic doesn't exist any more. I kept thinking about a mother and a kid going to see the film and then they go outside and when they run to get the bus, they will run differently together. That's why I did the film and why I wanted the film to be short because I felt that it was a kind of spell. You could take the ride several times and you could go back to it. It's not how long the film lasts, it's how long the impact of the film lasts. For me, watching the film includes the night after. It's a project of impact and how it affects your dreams.

The use of objects in the film is part of that change of time, literalising memory as tactile souvenirs. Are there objects which evoke powerful memories for you? A lot of objects that are special to me are in the film. The cane of the grandmother belonged to my real grandmother and some of her outfits are the ones worn in the film. It was the first time that I was working around a ghost; bringing back someone is one of the attractions of cinema to filmmakers. I had never tried that before and it's incredibly powerful. The first shot I did of the grandmother, that was the real corridor at my grandmother's place. Suddenly you say action and you hear this noise in this corridor and she appears and it's incredible. It changes the love that is inside an image, and this can be felt.

I loved the imagery of the black panther at the end of the bed; this symbol of grief. Where did that image come from and what does it mean to you? It's a personal image, but I think the fact that it's personal also makes it common. It's about not telling kids that monsters are only in your head, that monsters sometimes are real. And they're human. I tried to keep it as open as possible so that everyone can connect. No one else has asked me about this – I'm avoiding the real question. Sometimes the questions that nobody asks you are the most troubling. When you don't want to talk about a scene that's normally because there's a secret behind it that you want to keep. It's a secret of cinema

Natural Light

Directed by **DÉNES NAGY**
Starring **LASZLO BAJKO, FERENC SZABÓ, TAMAS GARBACZ**
Released **12 NOVEMBER**

Unlike its title suggests, light is mostly absent in this cold World War Two drama, where stoic Hungarian farmer István Semetka (Ferenc Szabó) is enlisted as second lieutenant in a unit sent to hunt down Soviet partisans. They reach an isolated village after their commander is killed in an ambush. Semetka takes command in a manner that's vacant, passive and detached – a testament to the need to stay emotionless in order to survive the atrocities of war.

It's a claustrophobic film, where the crushingly bleak nature of war is made to feel tangible. The characters are played not by professional actors, but agricultural workers from rural Hungary and Latvia, and their naturalistic performances are suitably framed by Tamás Dobos' textured camerawork and Nagy's sharp direction. There's an oppressive feeling that translates to monotony, but it does manage to transfer Semetka's emotional temperament to the viewer: the feeling of suffering in silence. That's only if you're not sick of war movies and you enjoy low-lit, slow-paced narratives and dour imagery. This low-on-dialogue, low-on-action, high-on-atmosphere feat is deeply cinematic, yet begs the questions: is there anything new to be said about World War Two, and is Nagy's effort enough to stand out in this terribly overcrowded genre? The answer, alas, is no.

MARINA ASHIOTI

ANTICIPATION — 3
Dénes Nagy's Silver Bear award is a huge victory for Hungarian cinema.

ENJOYMENT — 2
A test of patience.
(Or, war bad, protagonist sad.)

IN RETROSPECT — 2
Ripens slowly only to become stale.

There Is No Evil

Directed by **MOHAMMAD RASOULOF**
Starring **BARAN RASOULOF, MAHTAB SERVATI, MOHAMMAD SEDDIGHIMEHR**
Released **3 DECEMBER**

Unfolding across four divergent stories, Mohammad Rasoulof's Golden Bear-winning anthology film *There Is No Evil* presents a potent tapestry of perspectives informed by capital punishment in present-day Iran. Rather than being caught between poetry and censorship, Rasoulof strays from the stronghold of allegorical aesthetics and instead adopts a necessary and uncompromising antagonism against governmental oppression with fearless narrative urgency.

Each short is emotionally draining in its portrayal of the personal responsibility of executioners against a backdrop of authoritarian rule. Depictions of complex family dynamics, mandatory military conscription and corrupt state practices work in tandem to create a textured understanding of violence and its banality, of its immersion in the quotidian and the mundane. The first two vignettes are captivating and thrilling, making the chest tighten with anxiety, while the didactic dialogue of the third and fourth shorts falter in focus and tonally complicate the whole.

Despite an excessive 150-minute runtime, a fair share of abrupt tonal shifts and a somewhat heavy-handed execution of metaphors threatening to rob the anthology of power and cohesion, the dramatically consistent depictions of contempt, grief and rage bring an adequate sense of uniformity.

MARINA ASHIOTI

ANTICIPATION — 4
Defying a 20-year filmmaking ban, the Iranian auteur made his seventh feature in secret.

ENJOYMENT — 3
Potent and unsettling shorts portrayed with meandering pace.

IN RETROSPECT — 3
The film's political importance is explored with a sincerity that outweighs it shortcomings.

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Boiling Point

Directed by **PHILIP BARANTINI**
Starring **STEPHEN GRAHAM, VINETTE ROBINSON, ALICE FEETHAM**
Released **3 DECEMBER**

ANTICIPATION.
Will watch anything with Stephen Graham, but that's about it. **2**

ENJOYMENT.
Uncut Gems *by way of* Kitchen Nightmares*: what's not to love?* **4**

IN RETROSPECT.
Ugh, that ending... but the rest! **4**

The professional kitchen should lend itself well to the sort of sweat-inducing freneticism popularised by the Safdie brothers, at least judging by TV docusoap *Kitchen Nightmares*. So as to prove such a thesis, enter Philip Barantini's second feature, *Boiling Point*: shot in what appears to be a single take (yep, literally an uncut gem) across a Dalston restaurant's evening service, here's one to make you sweat more than a hard-pressed *maître d'*.

Enter a haggard Stephen Graham, whose character, Andy, is once again having a torrid time of it (is there anyone better, in the current moment, at playing the under the cosh everyman). As head chef, he has the sort of sandpapery stubble that signposts lassitude, his hands cracked, no doubt stinking of meat and salt. Arriving at work, he grumbles apologies down the phone to his son, once again having missed his swim meet.

More shit accumulates from herein. Before service, an overzealous inspector (Thomas Coombes who, in the most complimentary of terms, you'd love to slap the spit out of) knocks the restaurant's health and safety rating down from a five to a three; a casually racist meathead gets off to abusing one of the Black waiters; in a moment of striking sensitivity, a young lad on the pastry section inadvertently reveals his self-harm scars; and with little warning, in waltzes celebrity chef Alastair Skye (Jason Flemyng) with food critic Sara Southworth (Lourdes Faberes) in tow. Each table, it seems, is its own variously contrived little bomb. It's less a case of waiting to see which one blows first, more which will take out the entire neighbourhood.

Formally, the film seldom takes its foot off the gas. Matthew Lewis' handheld camera is imbued with its own erratic, ever-heightening cadence. He dips and darts around the tables and cooking stations like a pesky mosquito. We're given the occasional moment or two to wring out our shirts, but like a kitchen porter with ever-piling crockery to put through the wash, reprieves are few and far between.

Andy is our main point of orbit, but it's to Barantini's credit that we're given good time with the broader ensemble, most of whom have their own niggles and woes. Aside from Graham, as terrific as he ever is, Vignette Robinson stands out as Carly, Andy's brilliant but beleaguered second-in-command on the verge of jumping ship. In one of the film's many eponymous moments of explosive steam-whistling, she gives her incompetent manager the Alex Ferguson hairdryer treatment: a magmic torrent of rage that spills from the gut and, once the lid is up, feels impossible to stop.

With such a short runtime and gargantuan pile of grievances, it must be said, adequate resolution feels increasingly fleeting: it's all kept on heat until the last, with lots of small climactic moments leading to a strained crescendo, and a denouement that doesn't quite land. You get the sense, vanishingly rare so it is, that this could've done with more minutes. But, to paraphrase the smarmy Skye, it's 95 per cent of the way there; I've tasted far, far worse. **JACK KING**

Pirates

Directed by REGGIE YATES
Starring ELLIOT EDUSAH, JORDAN PETERS, REDA ELAZOUAR
Released 26 NOVEMBER

It's New Year's Eve in London. The year is 1999. Google is something we've barely heard of. Tamagotchis are something we all still care about. Three best friends are trying to break into the music scene through pirate radio and embark on a mission to see in the new millennium in style. It's a simple premise that forms the backbone of Reggie Yates' feature debut, *Pirates*, yet the film has all the ingredients to become a British classic.

Cappo (Elliot Edusah), Two Tonne (Jordan Peters) and Kidda (Reda Elazouar) have a solid agenda of 'Tekken and titties' to see in the new year, before Two Tonne's infatuation with local girl Sophie (Kassius Nelson) causes him to promise her the ultimate night out. Cooking up a scheme to get into the Twice as Nice Y2K party at the legendary Club Colosseum, it's a race against time to secure tickets and a kiss by midnight. With Cappo's tiny, bright yellow Peugeot as the dream machine, the boys set off on a series of madcap errands and misadventures.

Transporting the audience on a fun-filled throwback to both the '90s and young adulthood in general, Yates pays homage to London's rich garage heritage (have fun spotting all the cameos from legends of the genre), deftly deploying a thumping soundtrack of classics that are impossible not to sing along to. Through his infectiously likeable and talented protagonists, Yates' rollicking dialogue captures the brilliance of youth in all its bold foolishness and earnestness. His directorial style is as joyous as his writing, and we're introduced to the Pirates through the unmistakable sounds of 'Dooms Night' by Azzido Da Bass accompanying cuts of the trio clowning around in front of a red and white swirling backdrop. This zany opening is the precursor to a feature that foregrounds the vibrant and the celebratory.

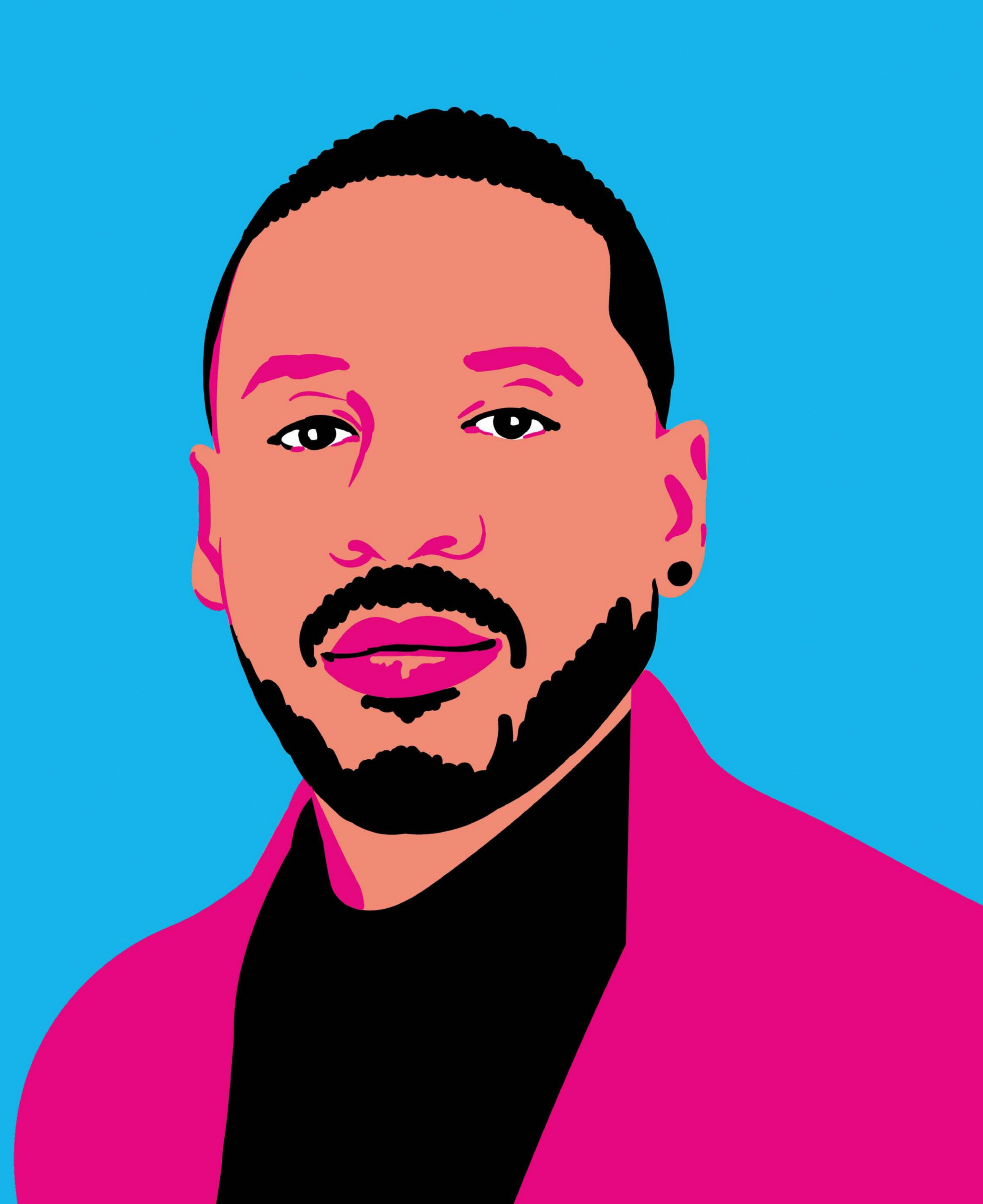
Aside from the humour, Yates also succeeds in realising the world of these teenagers so truthfully that their growing pains are acutely felt, despite our adult selves knowing these tensions to be largely inconsequential. This in fact creates a hankering for a time when such juvenile problems took the place of the 24/7 digital torrent of global issues we're now so attuned to.

At one point in the film, a character references London by saying, "We're not stuck here, we're from here". In making *Pirates*, Yates has stated his intention to show the lives of Black youth with a narrative other than the more prevalent depictions involving crime or hardship. With further consideration being given to the presence (or lack thereof) and portrayal of Black people on screen since the Great Enlightening of summer 2020, *Pirates* arrives as the perfect tonic. **CHEYENNE BUNSIE**

ANTICIPATION. *We all know Reggie Yates, just not the one who writes and directs movies.* **3**

ENJOYMENT. *The closest thing to a time machine with energy that explodes off the screen.* **5**

IN RETROSPECT. *A great slice of underrepresented British life that deserves to be seen big.* **4**



Interview by **MARINA ASHIOTI** *Illustration by* **AGNES RICART**

Reggie Yates

How a love of cars, London and UK garage informed the writer/director's madcap debut feature, Pirates.

A near -ubiquitous presence on British TV has finally spilled over to the big screen for Reggie Yates, who debuts as writer and director with the frisky, fun-loving comedy, *Pirates*, about three London pals searching for the ultimate Y2K high.

LWLies: What drove you to make a feature film and how was the process different for the things you've made for TV? Yates: I've been in film and TV for over 30 years now and I've always wanted to direct. For the longest time, I just never really thought that the stories I wanted to tell had any value. I was constantly being told that they wouldn't find an audience. Thankfully, I started to have some level of self-belief and encouragement about 15 years ago and, through that, I started making short films. As my short films got bigger and as I received more advice and guidance, I got to the point of making this feature. When I was a kid I started out at a local drama group called Anna Scher Theatre. They encouraged us to write plays and put them on and direct our other classmates as actors, and I started doing that from about the age of 11 so I've always been involved in it, I just never really recognised the power that I had in the stories that I wanted to tell.

A lot of the film is inspired by your youth. Is there a main personal aspect that you drew on in order to construct the narrative? More than anything, the friendship. That friendship between me and my boys as a teenager was really important. I think everybody knows how important, special and unique those teenage friendships are. Whether they last a lifetime or not, you're super malleable in your teens, and that brotherhood, or sisterhood, or whatever it is that you experience between your group of friends, can help define that moment. It definitely did for me. We've also seen a million and one coming-of-age stories from an American perspective, but we very seldom see it from the British perspective, let alone the Black British perspective. One of the things that I'm incredibly proud of about this film, is that it speaks to a version of Black British youth that we don't get to see very often, and most importantly the joy of that.

What is your relationship to UK Garage, to which this film is something of an homage? I grew up in North London, and I moved to South London when I was 14. When I was 16 or 17 I managed to get myself on Freek FM, which was my favourite radio station. Me and my little crew made a demo, and we got ourselves on this pirate radio station, and we were on the same stations as our heroes. Dreem Teem came from Freek, EZ came from Freek, Heartless Crew came from Freek. These were all people that we looked up to and wanted to be like, so it was a massive moment for me. I've still got a massive collection of tapes that I recorded from all of these North London radio stations. When I moved to South London, suddenly I was able to pick up a whole new wave of stations and DJs and MCs like Delight FM and So Solid Crew.

There was a huge car culture among young people in the '90s and music went hand in hand with mixtapes being passed around. For sure, that's why the car is such a huge part of the movie. It's almost as if the car, the 'Custard Cream', is part of the gang. I think for anybody that grew up in a big city with not many places to go, you'll know the importance of that first friend who gets their license I've described it as a little clubhouse on wheels. Those journeys in the little Peugeot that me and my boys used to take, that was huge for us.

Were Twice as Nice and Club Colosseum significant landmarks of your youth as well? Absolutely! All of these clubs that are in the film are real places that massively informed my teens. Ezekiel's is in there too, a club in Peckham that we used to go to when we were teenagers. I think it's a Costa Coffee now... When I moved to Lewisham up the road from Peckham, suddenly there were all these new clubs that were just really exciting. Choice FM became a bigger deal because I was on their patch. It's crazy to think that such a huge moment in London club culture is now a block of flats. I'm sure nobody in those buildings knows what that meant to Vauxhall and how many amazing things came from what was essentially a business club turned into a nightclub

Mothering Sunday

Directed by **EVA HUSSON**
Starring **ODESSA YOUNG, JOSH O'CONNOR, OLIVIA COLMAN**
Released **24 JULY**

Somewhere at the heart of Eva Husson's period drama *Mothering Sunday* is a story worth telling. The director makes her English-language debut with an adaptation of Graham Swift's 2016 novel of the same name – written for the screen by playwright Alice Birch – and finds a handsome, magnetic cast to paint this portrait of love and loss. Yet there is so little potent emotion or personality in the film, as mournful stares and countless intimate scenes look the part but ring completely hollow.

Odessa Young rises to the occasion as Jane Fairchild, who we find both on the eponymous Spring holiday and again at several points in her future. She is an orphaned maid working for Mr and Mrs Niven (Colin Firth and Olivia Colman who, astoundingly, are completely forgettable in this) who relishes a rare day off and decides to make the most of it by visiting her secret lover Paul Sheringham (Josh O'Connor), the Nivens' neighbours' son.

The pair's intimate encounters provide the film's most striking moments, both because of how frequent they are and how closely Husson lingers on the pair's naked bodies; as much when they are in bed together as when Jane wanders throughout the empty mansion on her own, basking in the opulence of a home she knows inside out without ever belonging to. It's this uncompromising approach, apparently aiming for a raw and sensual look at this young woman's life, which stops *Mothering Sunday* from depicting a story or character with much agency or originality at all. Jane is a writer, but spends much more time staring and waiting for things to happen to her rather than telling many stories. It's frustrating, too, after having seen Young deliver such an effectively incandescent turn as Shirley Jackson's seductive protégée in Josephine Decker's subversive biopic *Shirley*.

Husson doesn't exactly objectify her young stars by filming them unclothed so often, but a watery vision with little to say about the passion or tragedy of being a writer, of escaping the shackles of the world you were born into, or of carving out a new path for yourself, makes such bold choices eventually feel a bit queasy. There is care but no conviction, with half-hearted musings on the boys lost to the war (most of the story takes place on 30 March, 1924) and later reflections on the destabilising and isolating nature of grief that hasn't earned the poignancy such usually empathetic actors deserve.

There is pain worth immortalising in the stories of the past, and endless sadness found in a lonely woman's quiet existence. Yet *Mothering Sunday* fails to look beyond what the outside world can see, in order to really excavate a truth to be remembered once the holiday has passed. **ELLA KEMP**

ANTICIPATION. 4
Wonderful cast, painful era – fertile ground for something gorgeous.

ENJOYMENT. 2
Fearless cinematography and direction does not a good film make.

IN RETROSPECT. 2
Great gowns, beautiful gowns...

Becoming Cousteau

Directed by **LIZ GARBUS**
Starring **JACQUES-YVES COUSTEAU**
Released **12 NOVEMBER**

Spellbound by the splendour, silence and harmony of the sea, Jacques "Jeke" Cousteau, with his characteristic red knitted cap and deeply rooted nomadic instincts, was only truly happy when underwater. Liz Garbus' documentary attempts a straightforward dive into the depths of the man's own Odyssey: from being the co-inventor of the first commercially successful scuba equipment, to popularising filming technologies that brought the underwater imagination to the surface. In short, Cousteau paved the way for future generations of divers, environmentalists and underwater filmmakers. Although faded into relative obscurity, his films linger on, capturing the glorious seascapes and powered by gripping storytelling. He used to say: "My films are not documentaries. They are true adventure films."

Eschewing the conventional talking heads format, Garbus' film is an intimate and sincere *bildungsroman* in the way it skillfully draws on voiceovers from his family, friends and crew members, as well as older interviews and Cousteau's journal entries. We feel the presence of a "Jeke" who was larger than life, a legendary pioneer, a devoted environmentalist, an innovative filmmaker and a childhood hero to many (including Wes Anderson). His gentle nature radiates from the beautifully restored archival footage which includes crisp, never-before-seen prints and home movies from The Cousteau Society.

It's with mixed feelings of excitement and fear that Captain Cousteau and his crew of "maladjusted" oceanauts board the Calypso where they find a liberation that post-war life on land had denied them. They strip away everything that's useless to them, just like the mythological Argonauts would replace the parts of their boat, Argo, over time. Jacques' wife Simone, affectionately nicknamed La Bergère ('The Shepherdess'), was the matriarch of the Calypso's all-male crew, while she also shared the same curious thirst for discovery and adventure. Before passing, Simone wrote: "Calypso has given me everything. No man in the world would ever offer me what this vessel has". It wasn't blood, but rather saltwater that flowed in this couple's veins.

In his time, Cousteau aspired to go further and deeper before realising that the ocean was in distress and rapidly changing before his very eyes. It's been decades since Cousteau warned about the environmental disasters that we're experiencing today, yet his calls for aquatic conservation came years after he was contracted to undertake a geological survey of the seabed in the Persian Gulf, receiving investments by helping companies drill for oil. Garbus never tries to conceal Cousteau's flaws. For her, in order to understand where we are now, we first need to understand where we came from, and Cousteau represents that touchpoint. **MARINA ASHIOTI**

ANTICIPATION. 3
The famed doc maker returns with a profile of the beloved and influential marine explorer.

ENJOYMENT. 3
Aptly captures Cousteau's complicated legacy, but is nothing short of formulaic.

IN RETROSPECT. 3
A nuanced portrait of an oceanographer whose warnings are more prescient than ever.

King Richard

Directed by **REINALDO MARCUS GREEN**
Starring **WILL SMITH, AUNJAUNE ELLIS, SANIYYA SIDNEY**
Released **19 NOVEMBER**

ANTICIPATION.
A film about two women that's really about a man. Groan.
2

ENJOYMENT.
If you are going to make a sports family portrait, this is probably the one to go for.
3

IN RETROSPECT.
Richard Williams wants tennis superstars. Will Smith wants an Oscar. Both yield good results.
4

There's a difficult balance to strike in Reinaldo Marcus Green's *King Richard*. The accomplishments of many a prodigy – from Andre Agassi to Tonya Harding to Mozart – have been partially attributed to parental ambition. But, from the outset, a film centering the accomplishments of two of the greatest sports women who have ever lived on their father makes for an uneasy proposition. It also has to escape the shadow of a brazen Oscar bid from its star Will Smith, whose open ambition to secure a statuette has garnered nominations for *Ali* and *The Pursuit of Happyness,* but his trophy cabinet remains empty. Inspiring biopics seem the safe path to silverwear, and some of the moments in this film do seem pre-edited as an awards clip. So, it's cheering to say *King Richard* rises above all that to offer a well-conceived tribute to Black parenting, family and spirit.

Fans of the Williams sisters will already have a sense of who their father Richard is – fiercely protective of his daughters and an outspoken courtside presence who, early in their careers, gained almost as much attention as they did. Here we meet him long before the headlines, at a white country club peddling a 78-page plan for future success. The goal is to turn his kids into superstars: he sees this tennis thing as being a "pretty good racket." The pristine lawns of the club contrast with the scuzzy Compton courts his daughters practice on, but Richard and his wife Oracene (Aunjanue Ellis) want great things for their family and are determined to make it work. Watching young Venus (Saniyya Sidney) and Serena (Demi Singleton) practice on cracked concrete in the rain, it seems absurd to consider what the future holds. Yet this absurdity is what provides the film's interesting ideas about the way ambition and passion can be weaponised against marginalised people. Virtually every conversation Richard has about his daughters with a white person is peppered with micro-aggressions, which can be seen as the beginning of the bad faith lens through which the Williams sisters every display of determination or emotion continues to be interpreted. While not all Black families are "asking someone to believe you have the next two Mozarts living in your house," the film effectively speaks to widespread obstacles for Black parents trying to provide better lives for their children.

Where the film occasionally creaks is when the dialogue gets heavy with intersectional feminism, and you can see characters almost winking to the future. Director Green may get the best out of Smith, and his directorial style is, in general, very robust, yet his hyper-competence occasionally works to the detriment of the film, feeling cautious and out of step with the bold ambition of his subjects. Unlike in Smith's decent but saccharine American Dream movie, *The Pursuit of Happyness*, the star doesn't just rely on his charisma to sell Richard. Absorbing some of his eccentricities and volatility is what keeps him plausibly savvy enough to avoid predatory contractual clauses, and warm enough to preserve some childhood joy for his daughters. Many of the beats of their inspirational rise feel familiar, but the film avoids pitfalls simply based on the unprecedented nature of Venus and Serena's ascent.

LEILA LATIF

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Encounter

Directed by **MICHAEL PEARCE**
Starring **RIZ AHMED, OCTAVIA SPENCER, JANINA GAVANKAR**
Released **10 DECEMBER**

A film I find myself thinking about a lot is Jeff Nichols' *Take Shelter* from 2011, in which Michael Shannon plays a father plagued by apocalyptic visions which lead him to construct a bunker beneath his property in Ohio. The question hangs over the film as to whether his premonitions are real or a symptom of mental illness; it's a beautiful, haunting end-of-days drama that regularly springs to mind whenever I have a nightmare, or see a particularly overcast sky.

Michael Pearce's second feature *Encounter* recalls Nichols' work, but only in that it's an inferior film which deals with similar subject matter. Riz Ahmed plays ex-marine Malick Kahn, who appears to be on some sort of covert mission concerning extraterrestrial parasites that are invading the world. He travels to his ex-wife Piya (Janina Gavankar) and her partner Dylan (Misha Collins) to rescue his young sons, Bobby (Aditya Geddada) and Jay (Lucian-River Chauhan). The trio then set off on a road trip to a base Malick believes should provide safety.

But not everything is as it seems. Violent run-ins with other people on their journey lead Jay to question his father's story, and it soon becomes apparent that the threat may be closer to home than any of them wants to admit. *Encounter* has an interesting premise, but the film rehashes harmful tropes about the potential danger people with mental illnesses pose to others.

Time and again we see schizophrenia used as a plot device in films, usually painting people with the condition as unstable and dangerous to those around them. *Encounter* sadly typifies this stereotype, as the local law enforcement becomes convinced that Malick is a "family annihilator". The film becomes so concerned with action scenes that it fails to challenge this preconception, and the sci-fi plot is dropped entirely once Malick's psychosis is revealed, leading to frustrating a lack of ambiguity.

While Ahmed gives a typically strong performance, the real stars are Lucian-River Chauhan and Aditya Geddada. They have a charming screen presence and wonderful rapport with Ahmed, and really are the film's saving grace among a plot that is at best ill-advised, at worst offensive to people living with a mental illness. It's a shame considering that Pearce's debut *Beast* felt like a more nuanced approach to mental instability and avoided presenting the most vulnerable members of society as a threat to their loved ones. There is already a stigma around PTSD and mental illness in soldiers returning from war zones; *Encounter* makes no attempt to challenge this, instead leaning into the notion that trauma often leads to violence. It's a deeply unpleasant and reactionary film that even compelling central performances can't save.

HANNAH STRONG

ANTICIPATION. 4
Pearce's 2017 debut, Beast, *was remarkable. Excited for this.*

ENJOYMENT. 2
A cruel and strangely reactionary film.

IN RETROSPECT. 2
A bitter disappointment. Here's hoping some of that Beast *mojo returns for the next one.*

The Lost Daughter

Directed by **MAGGIE GYLLENHAAL**
Starring **OLIVIA COLMAN, JESSIE BUCKLEY, DAKOTA JOHNSON**
Released **17 DECEMBER**

Cinema is full of stories about trouble in paradise. There is something about the unspoiled tranquility of sun and sea that tempts past demons to the surface, as if our species wasn't built to be happy for long. Maggie Gyllenhaal uses her directorial debut – based on a 2006 novel of the same name by Italian sensation Elena Ferrante – to revel in and wrestle with what it looks like to have been a bad mother. The result is an off-kilter psychodrama driven by a stressful leading lady.

When Leda (Olivia Colman) first arrives at the Greek island where she is renting a room from weatherbeaten American expat, Kyle (Ed Harris), she can't believe her luck. She is a successful academic who teaches Italian Literature, presumably at Harvard (she mentions being from Boston by way of Shipley in Yorkshire) and is taking a solo holiday for her summer break.

The always-excellent Colman proves her versatility anew by acting in a mode not seen before in her back-catalogue. Under Gyllenhaal's direction the sweetness that radiates from her face, voice and energy are undercut by a calculated sense of animal selfishness that swings between impressive and excessive. And any solo traveller who has ever defended their space from the presumptuous overspill of a group is likely to cheer inside when Leda refuses to move from under a beach umbrella to make way for a family at the request of pregnant woman, Kalli (Dagmara Domińczyk), who is joined by her husband and a youth who calls Leda a "cunt". Three members of the intimidatingly large cabal include Nina (Dakota Johnson) a dark-haired vixen who has a daughter, Elena, with husband, Toni (Oliver Jackson-Cohen).

One day, while Nina and Toni are fighting, Elena goes missing. The film flashes back to a time when Leda, as a young mother (played by Jessie Buckley), is searching for her own lost daughter. Early signs that this is a character study less ordinary manifest in Colman's steely reaction to this objectively distressing memory. This is a woman who can wilfully freeze her emotions dead. She does so and then sets off to find Elena, returning her to a grateful Nina. Then, for some reason, she steals the child's treasured doll.

Interactions with the family contain a strange chemistry, pleasant-seeming but with a hint of sourness that threatens to overwhelm the mood. The extent to which this family's malevolence is real, or a figment of Leda's imagination, is something that Gyllenhaal never betrays. *The Lost Daughter* is a strange beast with an unwieldy structure and an uncanniness that is never quite anchored by events. Disparate plotlines abound without coming together in a satisfyingly coherent way. It may not all add up but this is an ambitious and taboo-tackling debut with an atmosphere that lingers thanks to gutsy performances from Colman and Buckley. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

ANTICIPATION. 3
High-profile actors turning to directing can go a variety of ways.

ENJOYMENT. 4
Genuinely audacious in its queasy characterisation of motherhood.

IN RETROSPECT. 4
Awaiting Gyllenhaal's next directorial effort with throbbing anticipation.

Interview by **HANNAH STRONG** *Illustration by* **AGNES RICART**

Maggie Gyllenhaal

The actor on stepping behind the camera for her powerful and enigmatic Elena Ferrante adaptation, The Lost Daughter.

An accomplished actress with almost 30 years of experience to her name, Maggie Gyllenhaal has built an impressive body of work by choosing to play complex, often disagreeable characters, from Lee Holloway in *Secretary* to Lisa Spinelli in *The Kindergarten Teacher*. With her adaptation of Elena Ferrante's novel 'The Lost Daughter', she uses her keen eye for the intricacies of women's lives behind the camera, resulting in a sultry, complex directorial debut.

LWLies: As the daughter of two directors, was filmmaking something that you were always interested in? Gyllenhaal: My dad was a director but my mom was really a writer – it wasn't until she was in her sixties that she directed a film. I only mention that because I think, yes, looking back, I probably did always want to direct. So much of my work as an actress when I look back on it having become a director, was directorial, in terms of storytelling, in terms of why this scene in this way, how to approach it to say what I ultimately wanted the piece to say. If I'm completely honest, I think I didn't feel entitled to even want to direct until much more recently.

The actors that move into directing often tend to be men. I don't know if there's less of a consideration, maybe, for them. As a woman there's this thing in the back of your head where you don't want to ask for more than you're given – it's like everything you get is a bonus. I'll say a few things about that. One is, so many actresses recently – Greta Gerwig, Rebecca Hall, me, Halle Berry – have directed their first film. In a way, 100 years ago, if you were a medical-minded woman you would think, 'I'm gonna become a nurse, not a doctor.' It's something similar like, you're a storyteller, you love film, you're a woman. It's an easier path to become an actress, a thinking actress, an actress with ideas. And there's definitely a model for that. It's a more difficult path – although there certainly have been women on it – to become a director. Now that there's a real attention for making space for women to express themselves in film, maybe you will see more actresses going, 'You know, I think I've always been a director,' cause for me I do feel that way.

Can you talk a little about the female directors who inspired you throughout your career. Is there anyone you have looked to when you knew you were making *The Lost Daughter*? I've talked quite a lot about Jane Campion. When I saw *The Piano* I was maybe 16. A lot of people disagree with me about this in general, but I think that there is such a thing as women's work, women's writing, women's filmmaking. I do think when we express ourselves as women it looks different, and it feels different to digest it as a woman. My experience of watching *The Piano,* I related to it. I don't know why that image of Holly Hunter's foot tied to the piano at the bottom of the ocean has never left me, but somehow it spoke to something in my experience that I had never spoken to before. That's the same with Ferrante in terms of writing. Her books are saying something true, honest, about a feminine experience in the world that I had never heard expressed before, it just went in so powerfully. I love Lucrecia Martel, I'm so inspired by her. I think I really took the confidence – she's so not literal, which is my favourite kind of movie, my favourite kind of script to act as an actress, my favourite kind of film to watch, where you have to use your own mind, your own heart to understand emotionally what's happening. She does that with so much confidence and grace, I love the way her films look. I also really really love Claire Denis. I was so in love with the end of *Beau Travail,* one of the most incredible sequences that I've ever seen. I actually kind of stole her credit sequence. Those are three that I really love and who influenced this particular piece of work.

You were on the jury at Cannes – what was your reaction to *Titane*, having just made a film about motherhood? I had never seen a film like that before. I don't know how much you can say in the magazine without giving away too much of the movie, but to me, going from the incredibly fascinating but much more conventional dance that she does on the car in the beginning, to the one she does on the fire engine at the end, I was like, 'Fuck, this is amazing! Look at the spectrum of what this is offering.' You could definitely put my film and her film together in a series about unconventional mothers!

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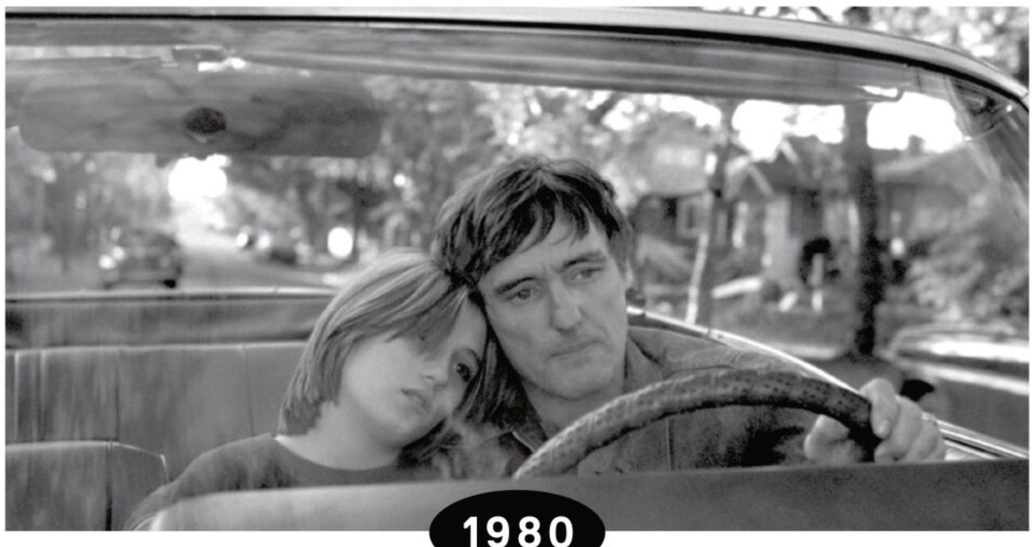

1980

1932-42

Out of the Blue

Directed by	**DENNIS HOPPER**
Starring	**LINDA MANZ, DENNIS HOPPER, SHARON FARRELL**

Blu-ray/DVD	*Released* **8 NOV**

After 1971's *The Last Movie*, it might be thought that Dennis Hopper would never make a film again. Yet, nine years later came *Out of the Blue*, a film that is just as unique and unhinged as his psychedelic western wig-out, if differently so. *Out of the Blue* imagines a world in which the brash young beatniks of the '60s (as seen in Hopper's *Easy Rider*) have aged but not grown, and now have children of their own. The summer of love is over, Elvis is dead, disco sucks, and punk is here to stay. The hippies rebelled against the old world, but now their kids despise the one they imagined instead.

Hopper plays Don, recently out of jail and hoping to reconnect with his wife Kathy (Sharon Farrell) and wayward daughter Cebe (Linda Manz in an unforgettable performance around which the film expands and vibrates). Instead, a leather-clad, out-of-control Cebe rages her way around the streets of Vancouver, spiralling away from her family and careering in and out of clubs, bars, and subcultures, lurching always towards a dark, explosive conclusion that, from the opening frames, seems somehow inevitable. *Out of the Blue* serves as a cynical time capsule as well as a clear sign of the value of allowing Hopper to create without restraint. Everything touched turns to flames, but as Neil Young sings in the film's theme tune, in the age of the punks, "It's better to burn out than to fade away." **MATT TURNER**

Mae West in Hollywood

Directed by	**VARIOUS**
Starring	**MAE WEST, CARY GRANT, WC FIELDS**

Blu-ray/DVD	*Released* **13 DEC**

It's hard to imagine that there exists a boxset which could hold the collected screen sass of diva, icon and high priestess of the salty rejoinder, Mae West, and yet here we are... This collection of 10 features encapsulates a strangely complete (and strangely sad) fragment of film history, as it brings together pretty much everything West did in Hollywood prior to calling it quits due to over-stringent censorship of her 1943 picture, *The Heat's On,* which led it to bomb at the box office. It was plainer sailing back in 1933's *She Done Him Wrong* in which West established her archetypal role of the man-eating cabaret chanteuse who wears new hourglass figure-hugging threads for each new scene. And forget ribald, West's dialogue is straight-up filthy, delivered in a manner in which you can't tell if she wants to kiss you or kill you.

There's an embarrassment of A-grade material on here, from her lively WC Fields skit, *My Little Chickadee,* to her incursion into more serious drama with Raoul Walsh's tale of a wanted murderess, *Klondike Annie*. The best is 1933's *I'm No Angel* in which West struts her stuff as the west coast's foremost lion tamer, and just lights up the screen every second the camera is pointed at her. She continued acting for the stage, but on the evidence here, West's was one of the most tragically curtailed careers in all of Hollywood history. **DAVID JENKINS**

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Sailor Suit and Machine Gun

Directed by **SHINJI SÔMAI**
Starring **HIROKO YAKUSHIMARU, TSUNEHIKO WATASE, RENTARÔ MIKUNI**

Blu-ray/DVD | *Released* **15 NOV**

You never really know what you are going to get with Shinji Sōmai, but it is generally going to be good. In *Sailor Suit and Machine Gun* – an early film by the underrated Japanese director who made gems like *Moving* and *Typhoon Club* prior to his passing in 2001 – unpredictability is key to the film's success. Meshing elements of the yakuza genre with a coming-of-age story, *Sailor Suit and Machine Gun* moves gleefully between action and comedy, continually upending expectations about where the narrative will go next.

After her father's death, high-school student Izumi (pop idol Hiroko Yakushimaru) inherits his role as leader of a small mob. At first this seems like fun, but when her underlings start turning up dead, she realises a rival clan is on her case. From here, a series of escapades unfold, alternately comic and shocking. Young Izumi is tested, most treacherously in a final face-off against the gang leader (Rentarō Mikuni, in a role with which he has a lot of fun) who has been attacking her poor henchmen. Despite the absurdity of many of the situations, Sōmai commits to directing in a style that is rigorous and often quite severe. The methodical compositions and carefully orchestrated long-takes elevate Jiro Akagawa's source novel from pulp into something grand and strange. As imperfect as the results may sometimes be, the film's best moments are sublime. **MATT TURNER**

The Love of Jeanne Ney

Directed by **GW PABST**
Starring **ÉDITH JÉHANNE, UNO HENNING, FRITZ RASP**

Blu-ray/DVD | *Released* **6 DEC**

A rare oportunity to take in a film by the German silent filmmaker GW Pabst, best known for his collaborations with bob-haired nymph, Louise Brooks (*Pandora's Box* and *Diary of a Lost Girl*, both 1929). This one also trains its focus on a woman of worldly wiles who seems to cause the men in her orbit to break into fighting. Yet not in a sexualised way, as Jeanne (Édith Jéhanne) is coy and careful, more worried about her personal safety than she is the various suitors and carousers in her life. We initially find her in post-revolutionary Russia where her diplomat father has been the subject of a deathly dupe. She flees to Paris, leaving her love Andreas to follow later, as he too is mixed up in political intrigues. Despite returning to the family bosom, things get worse from there for Jeanne, and it's a case of frying pan to fire to even bigger fire.

With its sparse intertitles and an ultra-convoluted plot, this isn't what you'd call a fun watch, as you really have to pay close attention to keep tabs on who's doing what to who and why. Yet its pleasures come from Pabst's stylised direction and his choice to evoke – in the spirit of the globe-hopping story – Soviet, German and French stylistic motifs. By the end it's hard to comprehend how Jeanne might outwit one of the men attempting to exploit her, but it's easy to lavish in the rich imagery, the expressive faces and the lively staging of each scene. **DAVID JENKINS**

Home ENTS

UK

1960

Shawscope Volume 1

Produced by **RUNME AND RUN RUN SHAW**
Starring **VARIOUS**

Blu-ray/DVD	*Released* **6 DEC**

If an avowed love of Kung Fu movies has led you to the oeuvres of Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee, your next port of call might be to delve into the work of iconic and prolific Hong Kong producers Runme and Run Run Shaw. The 10 films included on this new 'Shawscope Volume One' box set represents a mere drop in the ocean – perhaps a fifth of the brothers' annual production output (from the mid-'60s through to the early '80s Shaw Studios were punching out films at a rate of roughly 50 a year). Highlights include Jeong Chang-hwa's *King Boxer*, aka *Five Fingers of Death*, which is a film that Quentin Tarantino has probably watched once a month for the last 30 years. There are a couple of works by chop-socky journeyman Chang Cheh (1974's *Five Shaolin Masters*, 1978's *Five Deadly Venoms*) who was something of a dab hand at bringing in a fightin' good time on a shoestring.

As an example of the brothers' range, there's also the fabulously fruity *Mighty Peking Man* by Meng-Hua Ho which is a low-fi (to put it charitably) take on *King Kong* involving rather a lot of footage of a man going berserk in a low quality ape costume. All the material here has been lovingly resorted and packed with extras, and there's a real oportunity for both a cinephile deep dive and a some drunken late-night pleasure viewing – or even both at the same time. **DAVID JENKINS**

Devi

Directed by **SATYAJIT RAY**
Starring **SOUMITRA CHATTERJEE, SHARMILA TAGORE, CHHABI BISWAS**

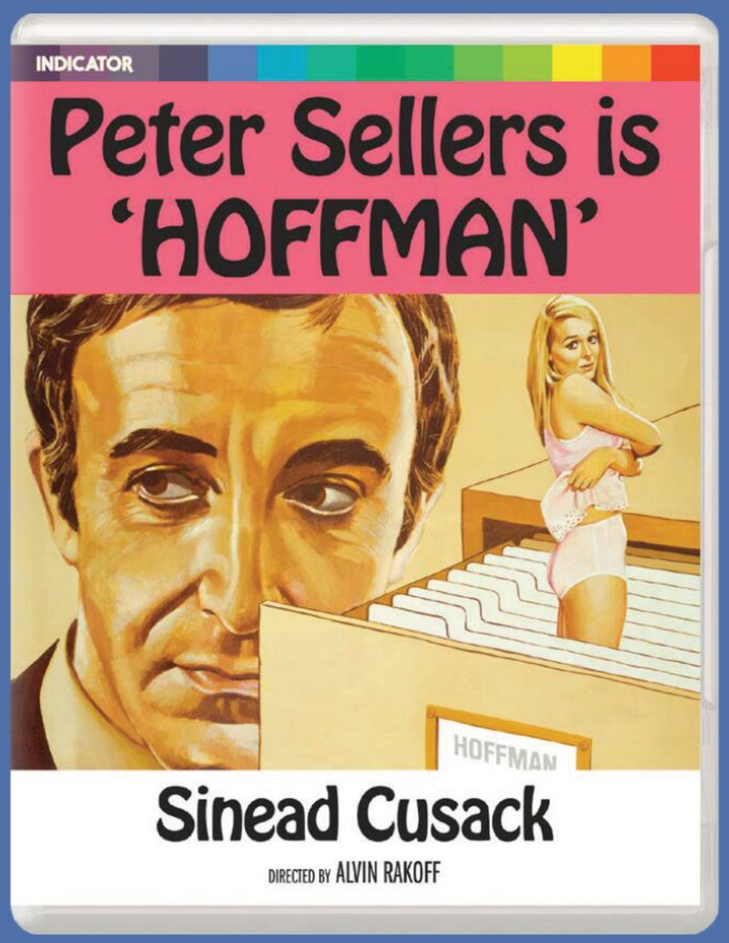
Blu-ray/DVD	*Released* **22 NOV**

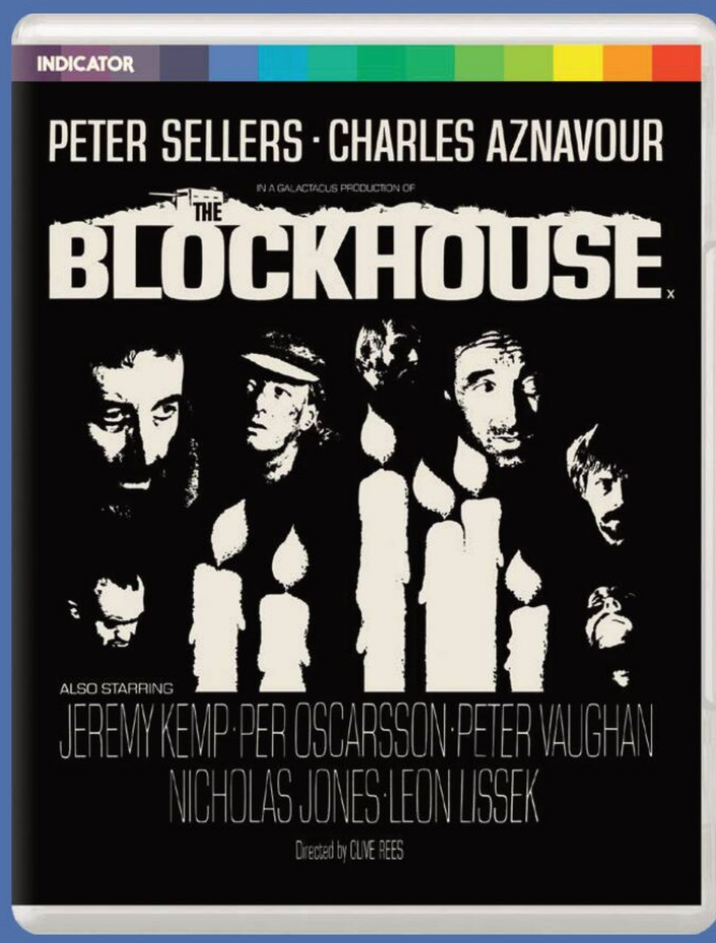
There are times when you just have to accept that you're an earthly deity in order to not rock the boat – we've all been there. Satyajit Ray's 1960 spiritual psychodrama appears on its surface as an all-gun's-blazing critique of false idols and misplaced religious fervour, but is also interested (as with films like 1963's *The Big City* and 1964's *Charulata*) in the undue pressures of being a woman in a modern domestic household. Sharmila Tagore is mesmerising as Doyamoyee, wife to a monied fop whose lust for social betterment leaves her tending to her formidable father-in-law, Kalikinkar (Chhabi Biswas). He treats her as second-class chattel, igonring her as she washes his feet. Following a bizarre fever dream, the old man wakes one morning beliving this humble woman to be Devi Kali, a humble godess with mystic healing powers, and begins, instead, to worship at her feet.

Ray makes a convicing case for Doyamoyee's acceptance of her newfound state of grace, and she dangerously plays along with the role in a bid to sate those around her. To her family she's now a *cause célébre*, to the public she's a renowned faith healer, even having some lucky successes. It's a cautionary tale that remains empathetic to the illogical drives of its characters, and gorgeously atmospheric to boot. **DAVID JENKINS**

INDICATOR

Limited Edition Blu-rays

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THE BLOCKHOUSE
ALSO STARRING
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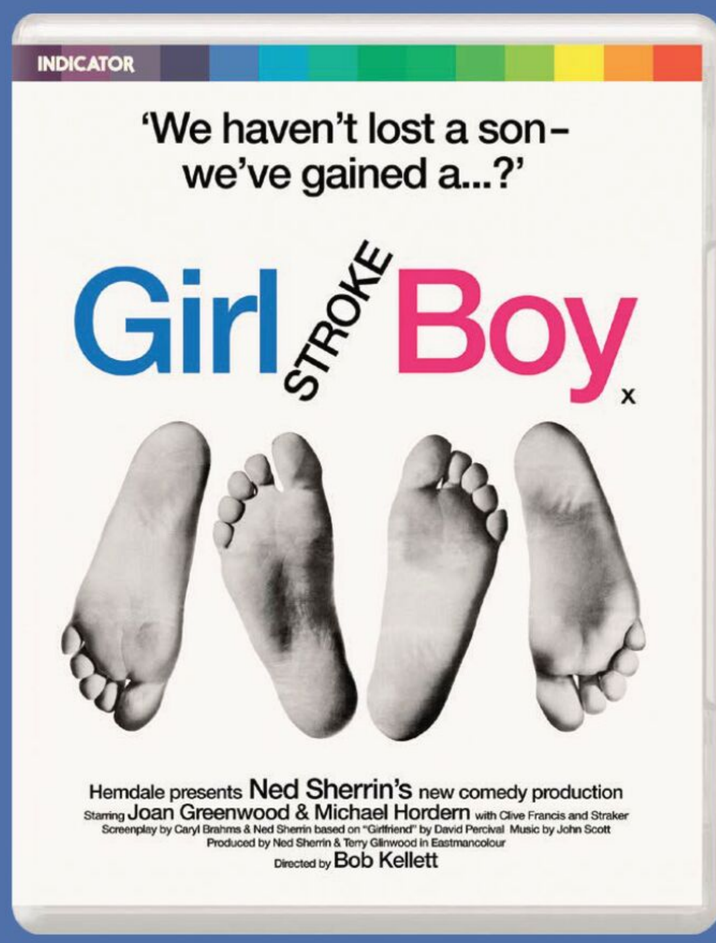
NICHOLAS JONES · LEON LISSEK
Directed by CLIVE REES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'We haven't lost a son – we've gained a...?'
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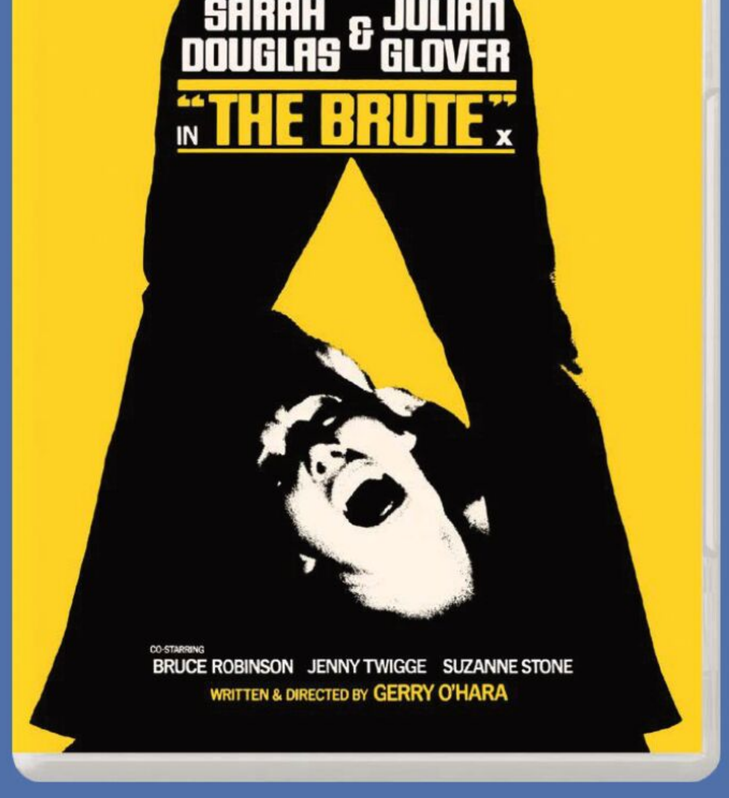

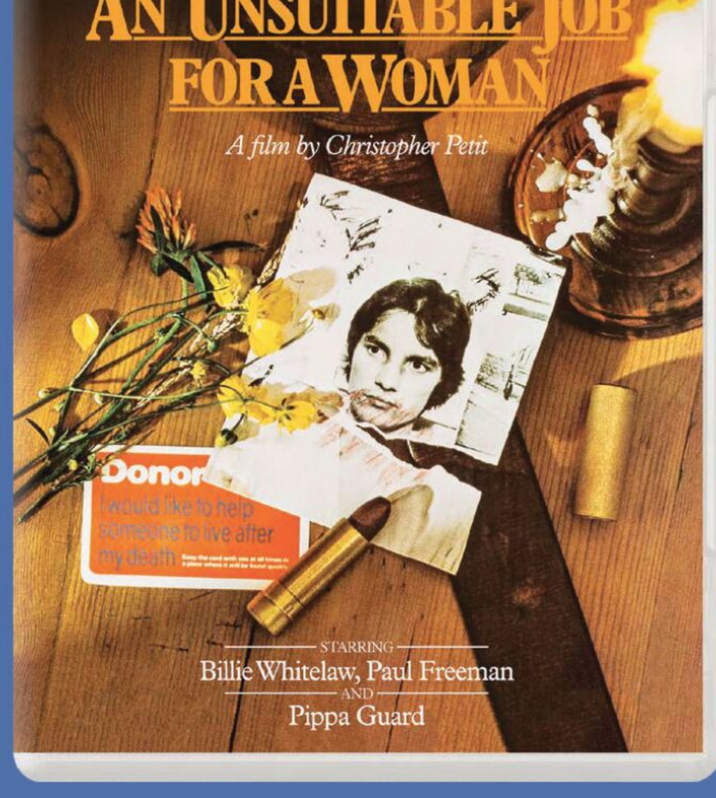

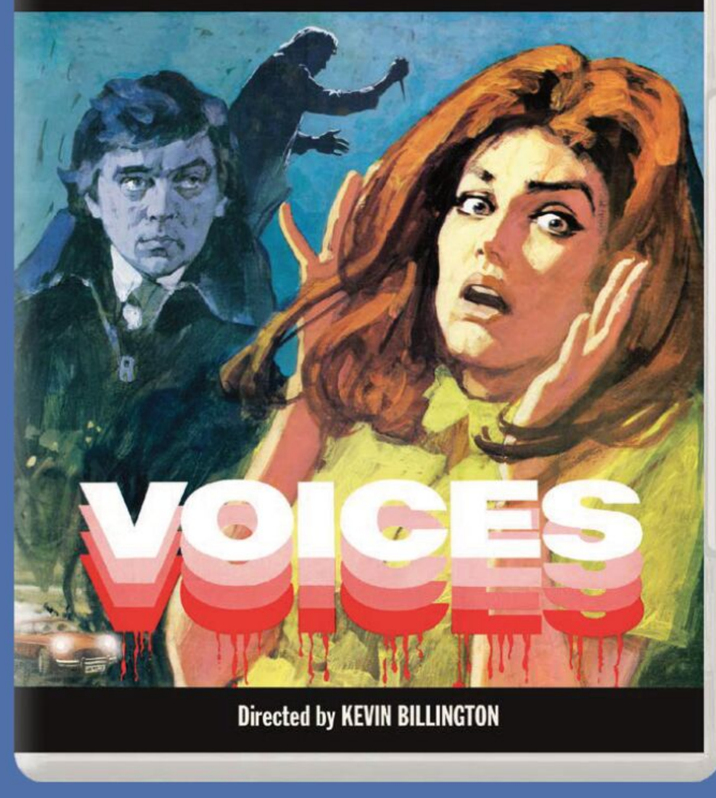

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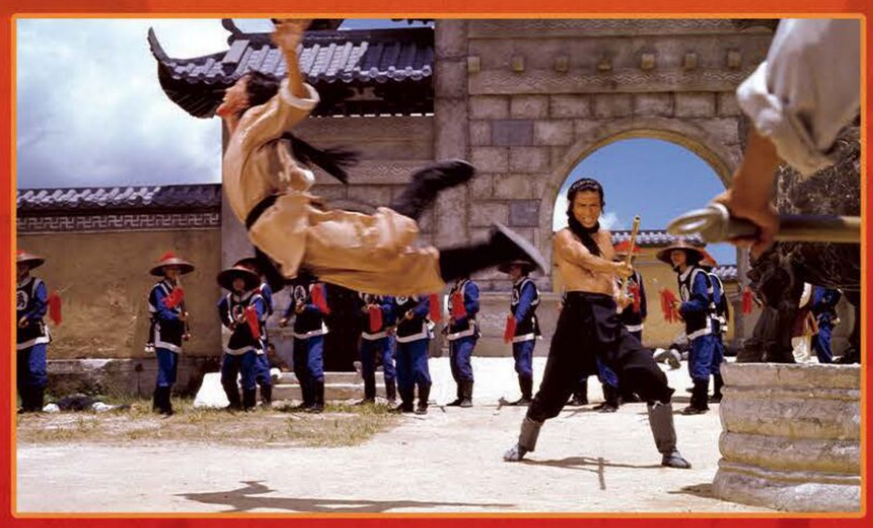

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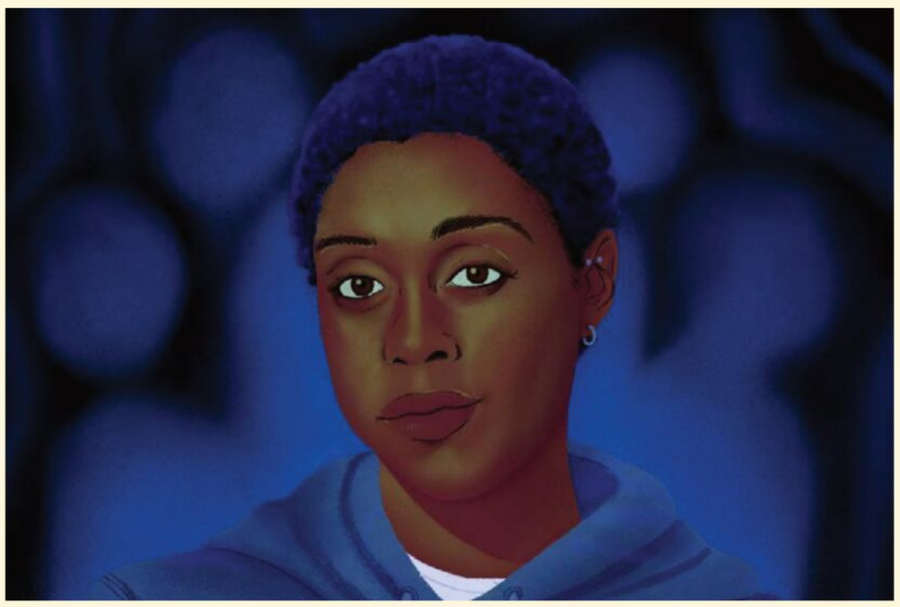

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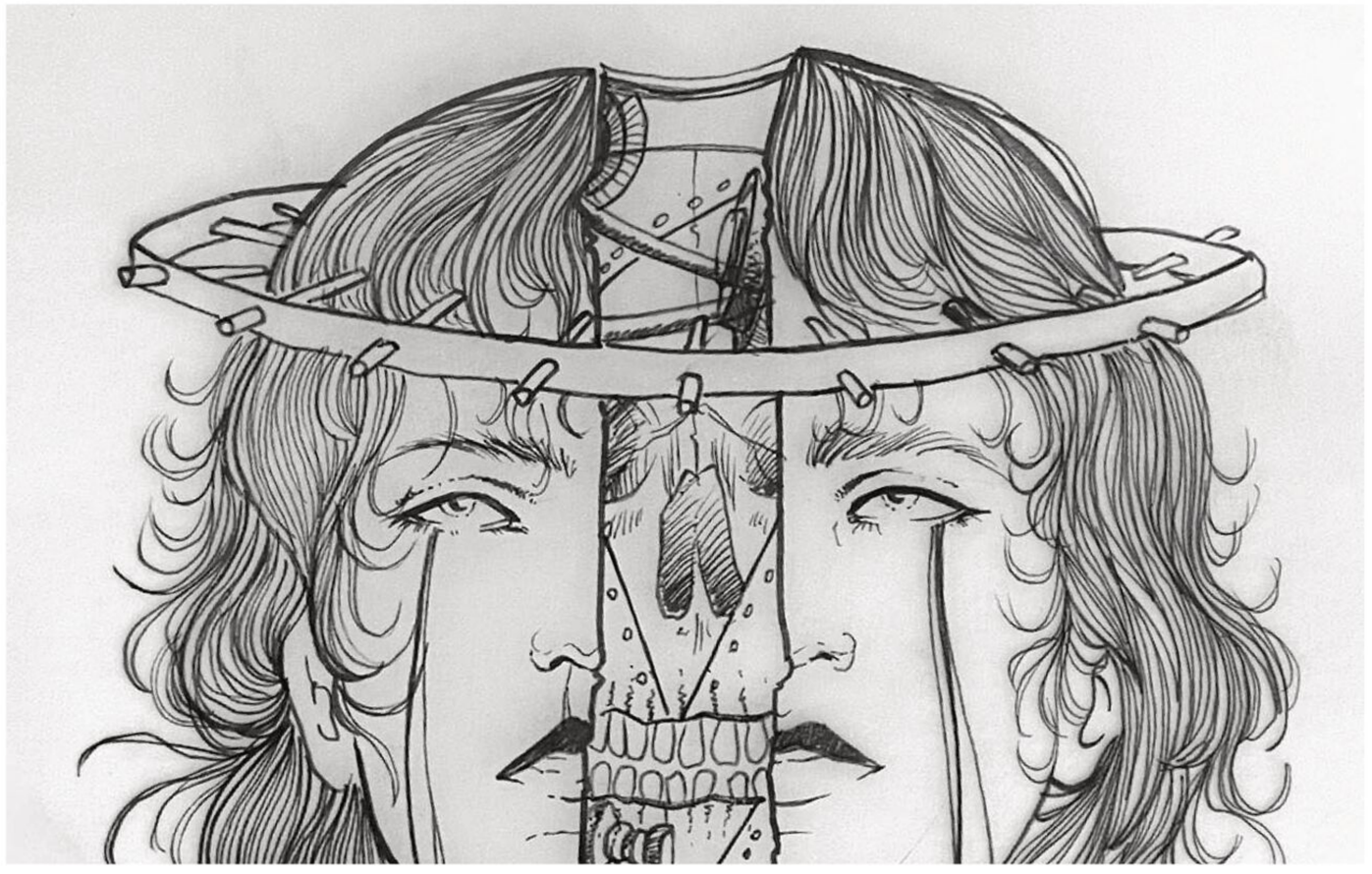

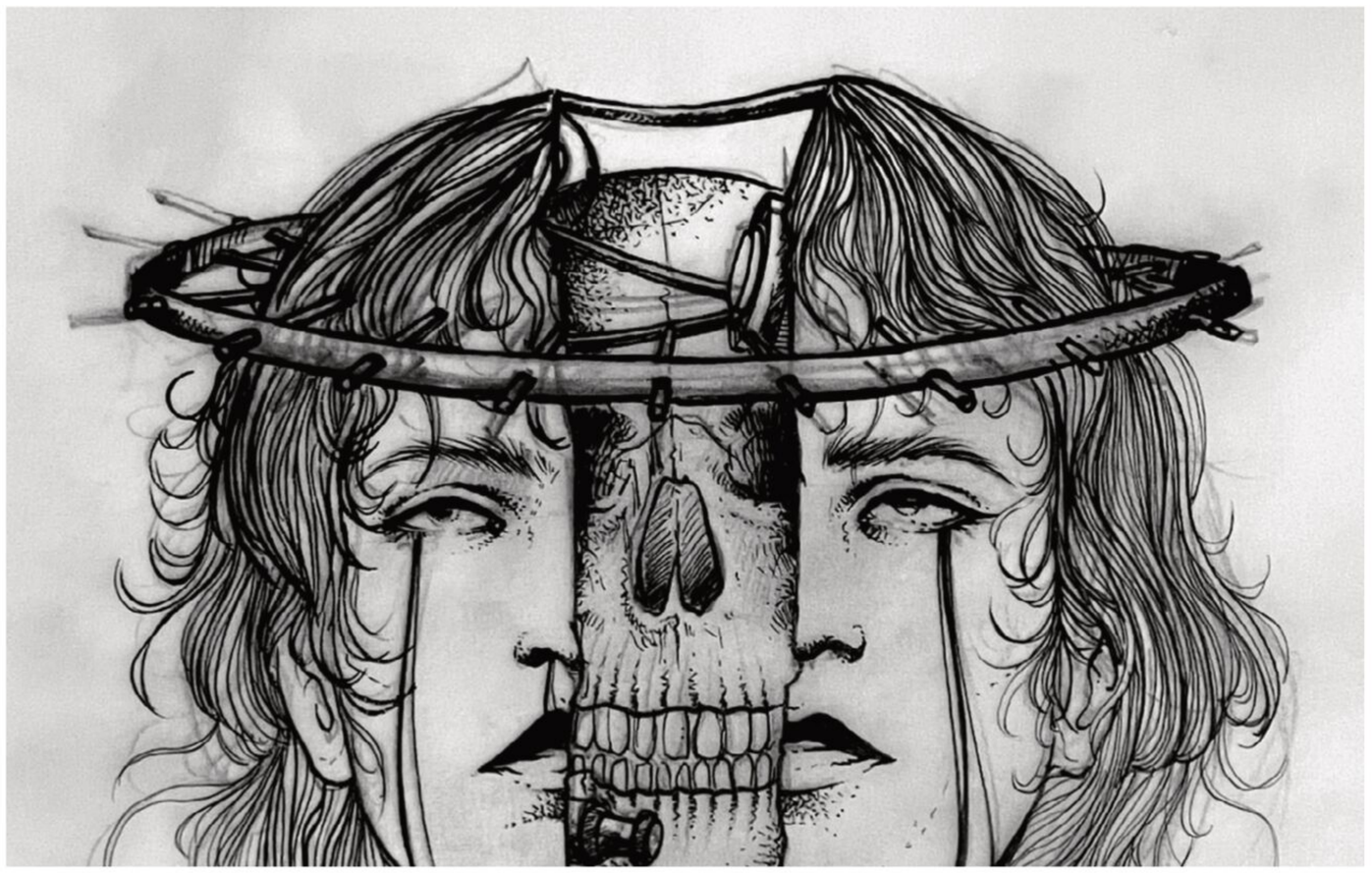

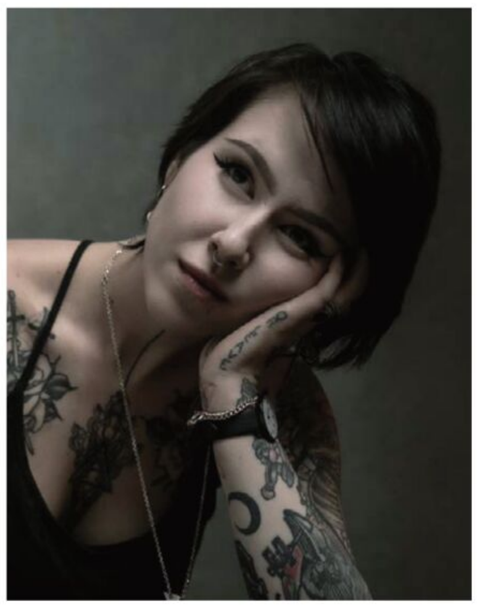

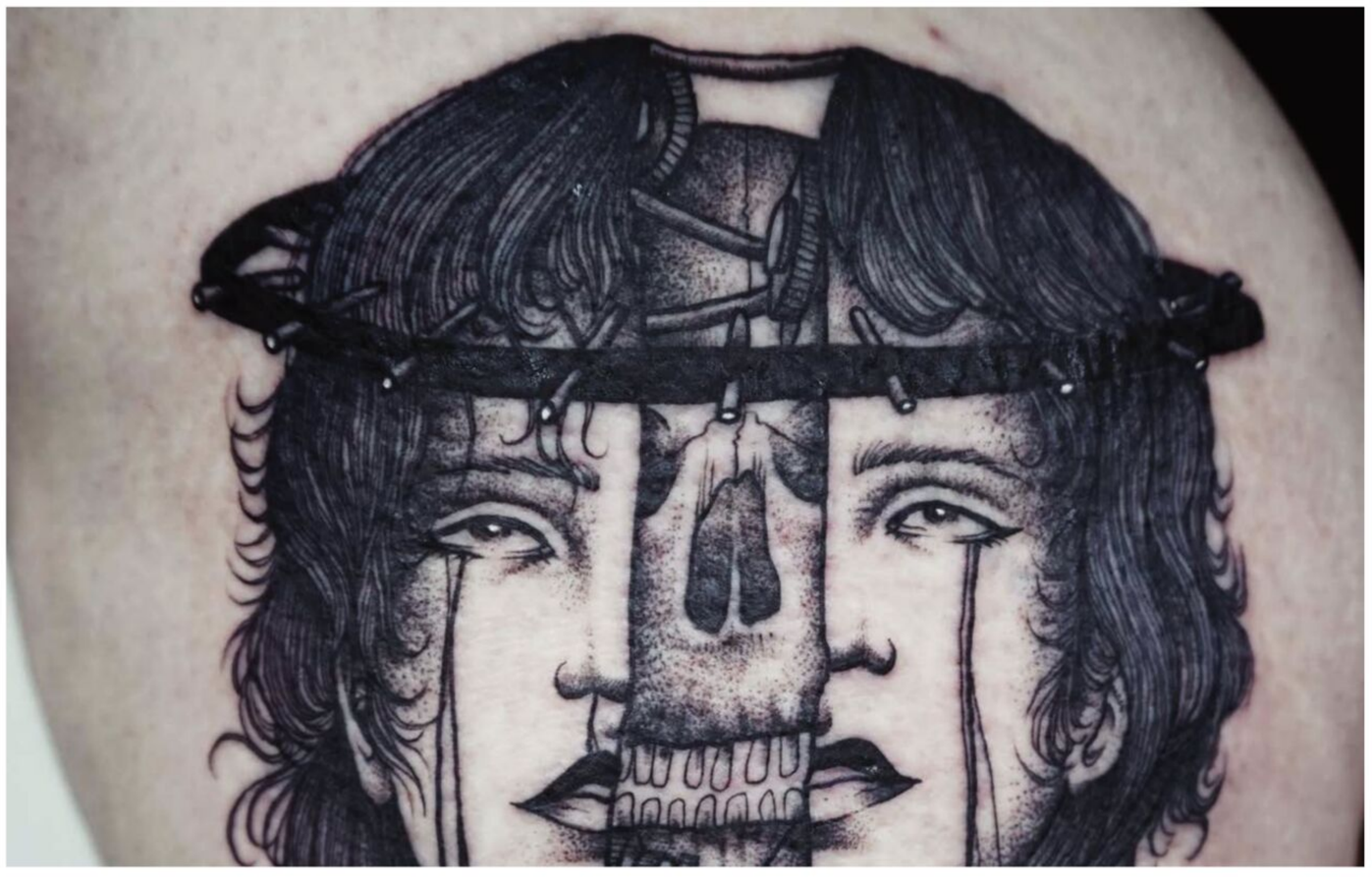

On the cover

Sophie Mo is an illustrator and tattoo artist based in London, who works predominantly in monochrome, and takes a lot of her inspiration from avant-garde works and horror manga. This cover has taken a couple of weeks to get developed on paper, and then about four hours to tattoo. It was done at Parliament Tattoo in London, Finsbury Park.

ig: @sophiemoillustration

Little White Lies

Published by TCO
Little White Lies – Huck

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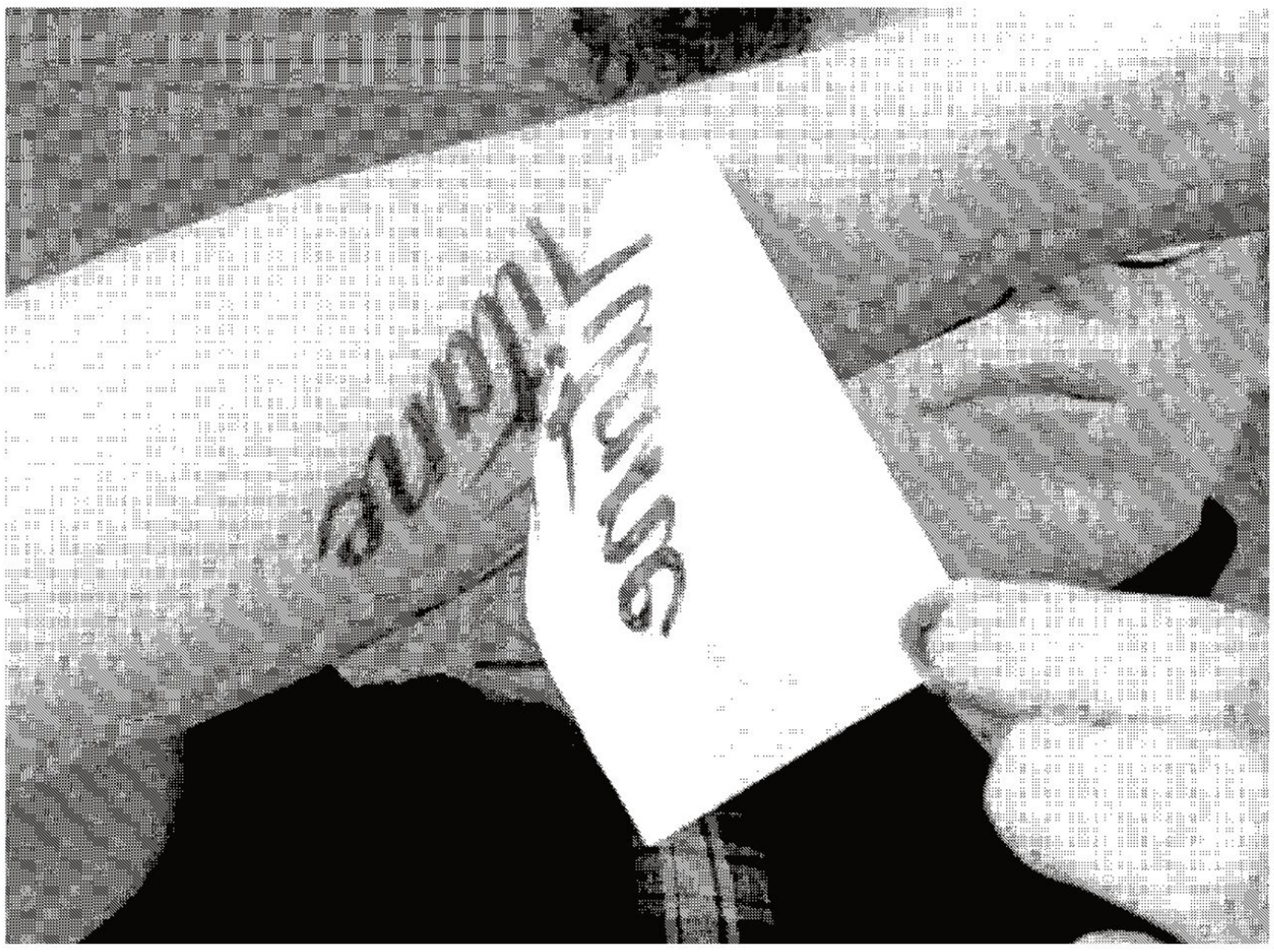

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Kambole Campbell is an Anglo-Zambian cyborg and freelance writer based in London. His work has also featured in *Sight and Sound, i-D, Empire* and *BBC Culture,* among others. He has transcended the human body and merged with the web to produce miscellaneous anime takes @kambolecampbell on Twitter.

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Christina Newland is a journalist on film, culture and boxing for *iPaper, Vice, Sight & Sound, BBC, MUBI, Empire,* and others. Her first book, an edited anthology called 'She Found it at the Movies: Women Writers on Sex, Desire and Cinema' was published in March 2020.

CHANCE
MAMAN
PAPA

A Titane-inspired watch list
By LWLies staff & friends

(Alphabetical)

Akira (1988)
American Mary (2012)
Bug (2006)
Climax (2018)
Crash (1996)
Demon Seed (1977)
Demonlover (2002)
Dr Caligari (1989)
Eraserhead (1977)
Excision (2012)
Eyes Without a Face (1959)
The Fly (1986)
How To Get Ahead in Advertising (1989)
In My Skin (2002)
The Incredible Shrinking Man (1957)
Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1978)
Kuso (2017)
Mad Love (1935)
Martyrs (2008)
Possession (1981)
Prevenge (2016)
Raw (2016)
Return of the Living Dead III (1993)
Rosemary's Baby (1968)
~~XXXXXX~~Society (1989)
Taxidermia (2006)
Tetsuo; The Iron Man (1989)
The Brood (1979)
The Skin I Live In (2011)
Trouble Every Day (2001)

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